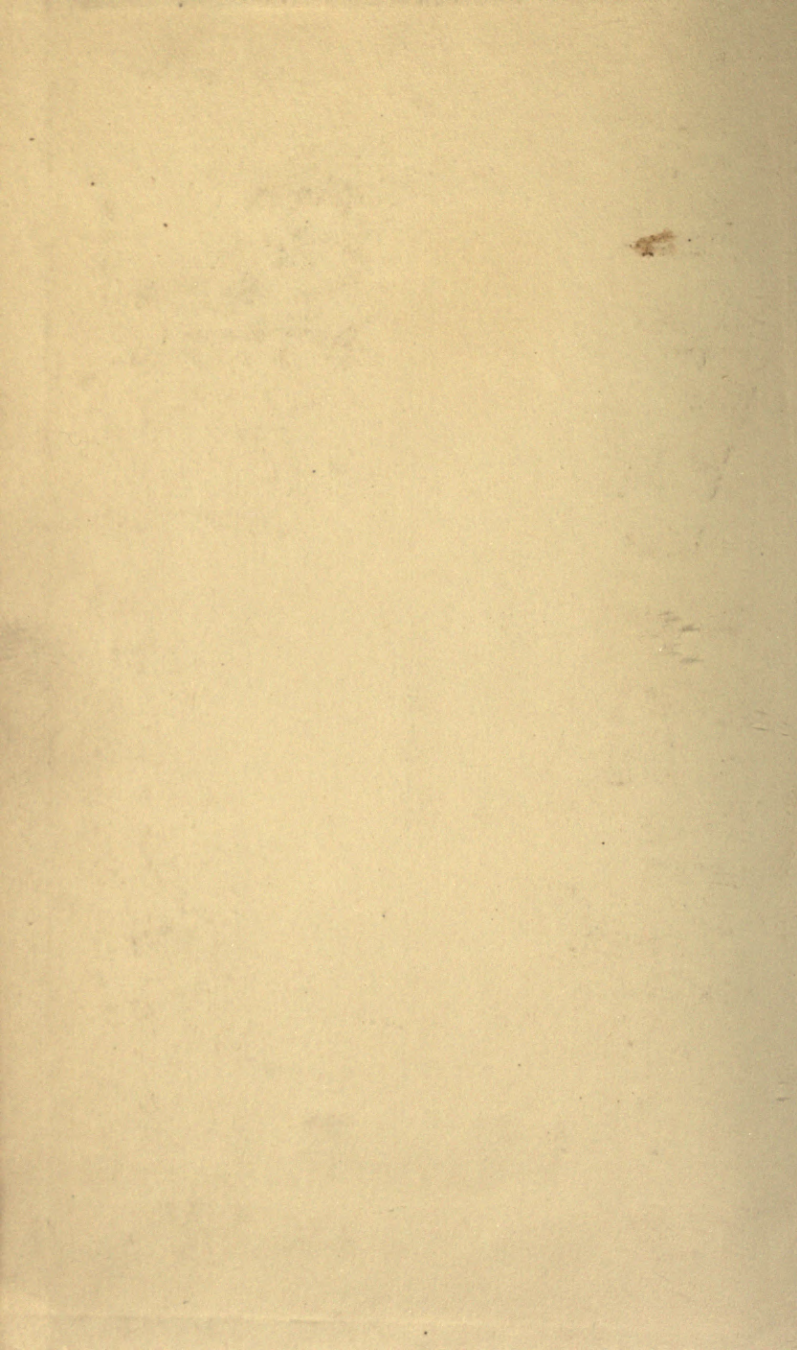


THE
ANCIENT
LANDMARK

BY
ELIZABETH
CHERRY
WALTZ

A TALE
OF KENTUCKY



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THE ANCIENT LANDMARK

A KENTUCKY ROMANCE
BY ELIZABETH CHERRY
WALTZ



REMOVE NOT
THE ANCIENT LANDMARK WHICH THY FATHERS
HAVE SET
PROVERBS, XXII, 28

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*To those men and women who take the larger
view and who walk in the light of it*

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PROLOGUE



PROLOGUE

GENERATIONS ago there rode over the Alleghanies on a young horse one of those Virginia youths to whom the tales of the vast hunting and pleasure grounds of the Indians in Kentucky were like glimpses of a new paradise. He made quest of lands to which he held claim because of the services of one Fordyce Fairfax, a young captain of the Revolutionary War. This Fordyce Fairfax had sighed out his heart and his life in 1781, from the effects of the thrust of a rusty bayonet, and had left this military claim to his young sister, Anne, who kept it for her first born son, one Fordyce Beardsley. She did not live to see him claim it, but, after a wild season at old Harvard, he set forth over the dividing mountains, leaving kith and kin behind, and for a season was lost to the more civilized world save through some rare letters that reached his aged grandfather in an old manor-house on the Potomac River.

These spoke of a successful settlement some fifty miles in the wilderness from the growing town of Lexington. He sent home a parcel of rare skins one winter and Indian gewgaws to his younger cousins. Later he wrote of his marriage to a maiden, Willa Childress, "of lineage good even as mine own," and of the new cabin he had builded. Two years later, on the day before Christmas, old Fordyce Fairfax, eagle-eyed and alert at seventy years, saw a horseman riding along the snow-covered river path, followed by another mounted figure that he took to be a woman-servant. The old Revolutionary soldier knew such travellers well, and long ere the horseman had come half-way up the tree-arched avenue, he was met by a joyous assemblage of white and black, shouting, half mad with joy over the return of "young Marse Fordyce."

The traveller dismounted with difficulty for his grandfather's embrace. He was yet a slender youth, a downy beard upon his chin. The old man shuddered at his emaciation.

"Where's your wife? Are you ill, my boy?"

The wanderer gave a wan smile.

"She is dead, sir, and I have come home to die."

He walked in the bleak sunshine to the figure on the second horse. He took from it a bundle that had been hidden in the folds of a heavy, fur-

lined riding-cloak. His eyes wandered over the group and singled out that black Aunt Dolly who had been his own foster-mother, although she was still a comely woman of eight and thirty. He went to her and laid the bundle in her arms.

"Here's what I have left," he said brokenly, then walked slowly to the house, his arm in that of his grandfather.

The bundle proved to be a six months' old son. He had brought a widow woman over the mountains to care for the child, and she waited until spring to return, as the journey could not well be made so late in the winter. From her, but not from the weary young master, was learned the stormy story of pioneer life, the struggle for existence in the cabin on the clearing, and the young wife's death, caused indirectly by a fight with a panther which had made Fordyce Beardsley a physical wreck. In the next spring-time the widow woman went back over the mountains with a new husband, and the young master charged them to keep his clearing, hoping, in spite of his poor health, to return in another year.

It was not to be. He lived to see his yellow-haired child grow happy and merry in the midst of a dozen romping second cousins. He begged them to bury him with a poor little silhouette of his girl wife on his heart. One day the old man sat desolate in his hall with nothing to remind

him of his sister Anne but an exquisite portrait painted in England, on the wall, a claim to some hundreds of acres in the new State of Kentucky, and a blond child that had not about him one look of the Fairfaxes or the Beardsleys.

The old man saw this Fordyce Beardsley overtop the sons of his other sons in stature and outstrip them in mental attributes. He lived to see him enter his father's college. He left him the old home on the Potomac and permission to marry his second cousin, Lucy Rose, of which the young man took immediate advantage. He thereafter lived the life of a comfortable and elegant country gentleman, honoured by all, although by some deemed a little peculiar on account of loose and heterodox views on religious questions. In 1830 he visited Kentucky for a brief season and disposed of his land there for a fortune as the times went. He had in him a shrewd vein which he showed by investments which were always successful. He became a man of affairs and travelled abroad.

The eldest of his two sons was named Fordyce as the family name, but the second was called Lucian. In this generation strange traits cropped out, for that is the subtle way in which dead men tell tales, to say nothing of dear, dead women. Fordyce was tall and fair, but Lucian was like nothing so much as a gaunt and sinewy Indian

boy, and his sister Willa resembled him, with little hint of that lovely and fascinating beauty of which the Fairfax and Beardsley women had ever been proud. The father gnawed his lips and said nothing, but, after his return from the Kentucky sojourn, he told his wife that which made her look with a half-afraid horror at some of the movements of her younger children. It froze her tears when the wilful, high-cheeked Willa lay, a still corpse, in the drawing-room, and all the countryside mourned. She kept her grave covered with flowers, but it was surely best, it was surely best, she often told herself.

By the same irony of Fate the fair son was drowned in Lake Geneva the year after his graduation from his father's old *alma mater*. There was left the tall, lithe, taciturn Lucian. No one guessed his true nature for he was a silent man. He finished his college course in accordance with his father's wishes, then came home to aid him and to study law during three winters in Richmond. The agitation before the Civil War held him in its fullest intensity. He and his father came very near together in the days when men's hearts anticipated the tattoo of the call to arms and their passions kept their emotions wrought up to white heat.

The father was not idle in the years before the war. He was thoroughly Southern, but his shrewd

business sagacity anticipated the actual outcome. He believed that the hour was at hand when slavery was to come to an end either with or without war. For two years he prepared for the coming storm. His wealth was guarded, he had few young negroes, and he persuaded his wife to take an orphan niece and go to Paris, meaning to join her within the year.

When the storm broke, he could not make up his mind to leave his son. When Lucian donned his captain's uniform, the father's proud eye discerned the born fighter, the outcome of that strange alliance with the Childress family a century before. He never looked at Lucian without a picture in his mental eye of that Indian babe who had been found lying at the door of a pioneer cabin in the mountains by one Bogardus Childress, a fur trader, who had emigrated early from the Carolinas. Bogardus adopted the boy and kept him till the arrival of another Childress brother, Huon, with his family, some six years later. This Indian boy had been bred up as a white man, and being of a noble and gentle disposition, he won and married Blanche Childress after having been baptized by a priest and taking the name of his adopted father. Fordyce Beardsley knew that, in Lucian, this dead-and-gone Indian ancestor strongly asserted himself. He arose from his forgotten grave beside his

pioneer wife (herself of an old Huguenot stock), and again faced the world as a brave and a warrior.

They sat one day, just after the war storm broke, in the library of Fairfax Woods, the fine old Virginia home. Lucian was to leave for Richmond in two days. He was calm and proud, but his eye wandered over the paintings on the walls, the familiar furniture, the landscape, with a prescience that amounted to a farewell.

"There is but one thing I now regret, Lucian," said his father. "I might as well tell you. I expressed to you several years ago the disapproval I should feel at any attentions you might pay Miss Venetia Bowen," he began.

Lucian started and gave a quick, sidelong glance at his father.

"I wish now that I had not denied you. It is a hard thing to have only one son, and I wish I had not denied you."

Lucian came around to the table and folded his arms. He stood silent and motionless for a time.

"Then you will not mind it, father, when I tell you we have been married for six months. You see, sir, she was so poor and I could not go away and fight like a man, leaving her here alone. You may have to look after her later on."

The father did not go to Paris, for he took his

son's word as a command. Captain Lucian Beardsley died on the battlefield of Bull Run, and the young wife died the next day ere she heard the news, leaving a desolate old man in charge of twin boys in the war-torn city of Richmond.

He could not be blamed for his next action, although he was afterwards accused of cowardice. He carried the children to France and, for a number of years, lived there, until the death of his wife forced him to bring her body to her old home. With him came the two boys, Fordyce and Lucian, their youth to sweeten all his later days with absolute devotion. The old man was father, mother, and grandfather to them. They were alike, though one was fairer than the other and strangely congenial. They seemed a combination of elemental forces. The only apparent difference of feeling between the boys was that Fordyce was religious, while to religion Lucian was startlingly indifferent. And they grew to manhood ; Lucian, the darker twin, was the handsomer, the more daring and brilliant. There seemed to the weary old man, whose fond eyes they closed, to be a singular freedom and unconventionality about him that suggested his Indian ancestor no less strongly than the personal appearance of the Confederate captain.

The grandfather, Fordyce Beardsley, who was born in the Kentucky clearing, died in 1885

while the twins were still in the old college at Cambridge. The new Fordyce went abroad after his graduation, found congenial times and manners in England, and married an English girl of noble family and connections. The old home had been sacked and ruined during the war. Lucian lived in New York, Paris, anywhere. He was strangely in accord with the free life of the end of the century, and he lived much as he desired. Women had not been an essential part of his early life, and he found youth slipping easily by with little anxiety or *ennui*. Of late years his chief pleasure was a stable of good horses, and he had an idea of selecting a string to take to England some day. Fordyce was there and had one or two children whom his brother had never seen.

The selection of these horses led him to Kentucky. He had always intended going there. Old Fordyce Beardsley had told the boys the story of their lineage. He dwelt upon the brief sojourn of his own boyish father in the state during its crucial period, and he desired that they should visit the spot at some period in their lives. Nor did he neglect to speak of that Indian ancestor, whose forgotten grave lay on the side of the southeastern mountains, and who had been reincarnated in their father's face, courage, and disposition, to die a soldier's death for a most sorrowful and lost cause.

CHAPTER ONE

A BARK TO BROOK NO STORMY SEA

MAY in Kentucky. It was the festival of the year in that pleasure-ground of Nature. The very heavens seemed to smile over all the world with a tenderer, more translucent blue from day to day. Growth ran riot. Tender things sprang out of the earth in a night, hastened and ran about to cling to and clasp sister and brother growths, and entwine as sleeping babes in the same cradle. The long branches of splendid trees hung low for vines to reach upward and hold upon. Everywhere was that same generous, over-full, ever-giving wealth of stalk and tendril and bud and prodigal bloom. Frequent warm showers were only harbingers of more gaudy sunshine, more flaming blossoms, more drunken bees overloaded and cloyed with sweets.

One morning there stood upon a gallery built

about the second story of a plain, whitewashed wooden house, a group of Kentucky men, or, as they best love to hear it phrased, "Kentucky gentlemen." They were men of a strong type, fused and welded from diverse stocks by time and circumstance. The composite was good to see. It was brawn and some brain. It was without fear, and it held honour high. It was patient and sweet-tempered at its best, but its anger was fierce and relentless. It had in it a strange and courtly chivalry, yet, if brought into contact with men of great Eastern cities, it possessed a certain suggestion of the bucolic, a certain reservation which actually meant dwelling in the midst of generous spaces and good privacy.

When once the type was recognized the members of the group on the gallery were like the notes of a scale upon an instrument. Some were high, some were low, others only semi-tones of a neighbour. Most of them were quite fair, blue of eye, light of hair, and tawny of beard. Those who were smooth of face retained grave but boyish expressions.

Before the group on the gallery spread a beautiful expanse of rolling country, bounded only by hazy blue mists on the horizon. Here and there noble groups of trees appeared, again there was a red-brick house in the distance or a whitewashed cabin whose smoke arose up as straight as that of

an accepted sacrifice. Nearer were the hay meadows, pastures of blue-green grass, thick hedges. Directly before the house lay a half-mile track, a row of whitewashed stable sheds, and several cabins. It was the private race-track and view stables of a Kentucky horse-breeder and buyer.

The owner, Colonel Buckman, was now gesticulating below. His nephew, Ethelbert Sugg, was on the gallery with several visitors and horse-buyers from Lexington. Ethelbert was exceedingly tall, and he blushed easily. Still he bore himself like a man, and he showed a shrewd knowledge of horse-flesh and of men. Beside him stood the Virginian whose lineage we know, Lucian Beardsley. He was, in the midst of that group, a singular figure. Nearly as tall as the Kentuckians, he was so well proportioned that one forgot his height. His well-cut hair was thick and black, but not coarse. He was fair with a warm fairness that was not ruddy. His brows were delicately arched, his one inheritance from his mother. His eyes were clear, dark brown and bright. His lips were full, red, and sensitive. It was, however, certain subtler characteristics that most distinguished him. He was as alert as the panther that had been his great grandfather's death, as softly stealthy in his unfathomable expression as his Indian ancestor, and yet he was as polished, as finished a

product of the nineteenth century as the times and the manners and culture could produce.

It was not without a lively and a healthy interest that this man had come into Kentucky. Indeed, whenever he saw the word printed it was as though some sharp string of memory twanged. He had read much of it, he knew its romantic and absorbing history, and he came to it with the feeling of reverence Kentucky expects only from her sons. But he was not prepared for the phantasmagoria, the illimitable miracle of prodigality with which Nature rewards her worshipping delvers in Kentucky soil, all her shepherds and her land princes. Here indeed were cakes and ale. Here indeed the heart could be young, the pulse merry. He was stirred from all his poises and balances. Life seemed to be a continual picnic and a festival. It stirred him more to see a bareheaded woman in a diaphanous gown saunter down the streets of a Kentucky town under her light parasol, than to view the pretended nudity of the chorus girls on a New York opera stage. Women to him had been one of the luxuries of life as candied cherries add a sweet zest to a compound drink. On this soil she was the wine of life and a wine that made him a little dizzy.

Buying horses is a good excuse for dawdling. Lucian Beardsley could dawdle. He went about all his pursuits and pleasure like a gentleman.

There was little of the beast in him by nature or descent, and he continued his election to a decent course in life as a happy event, not as a thing to be dallied with or sullied. Nature had her way with him in Kentucky, but only made his soul waxen for the impress of a fate and a future that was bearing down upon him.

He had to come out to this sale from Lexington because of the fame of several two-year-olds having reached the buyers. As yet he had only succeeded in buying Fordyce a famous saddle horse for which he had a commission from over the sea. There was one horse near this place of which many kind things had been said, but it belonged to a half-mad doctor whose words were not to be depended upon. This man had been boasting the night before at Colonel Buckman's expense in front of the Grafton Hotel, and he then promised to bring over this vaunted "Kentucky Cupid" and let Lucian time him. As yet he had not made his appearance, and the sale went on rather monotonously.

It was eleven o'clock before the lank Ethelbert called out with a twist of his shoulders:

"Foah Gawd, the doctor's coming ovah field with Kentucky Cupid."

Snatching the glass, Lucian Beardsley turned it to the south. Over the blue-grass pasture rode the slim figure of the doctor, a small darkey rid-

ing another horse. At the latter animal the Virginian gazed with intense interest. There was no doubt but that it was the most promising looking horse in the country.

"Wondah he's up," remarked Ethelbert; "leastways he usually sleeps all day and prowls of nights."

"Queer habits," remarked Lucian, taking a cigar from his teeth.

"He's a demon," broke in another man, "or as nigh it as we want in these parts. If I war sure all those tales —"

"Now don't you belie a neighbour," broke in a third man; "he went to school with we all."

"Ef it war not foah that, Allison," said the other, flushing red, "we none of us could rest in our beds."

"Is he dangerous?" inquired Lucian with curiosity.

"He is all right ef it was not foah some drugs he uses," said Ethelbert shortly, "and he takes them free, as the best o' men sometimes take their whisky, gentlemen."

By this time the small negro had guided the horse through a gate onto the track and cantered him easily down.

Lucian's heart bounded. This was a noble horse, an equine king. Little need to call for his pedigree, to examine his registration. The satin

flanks shone red in the sunshine, quivering delicately. The small head was erect with a conscious pride and spirit. The beautiful eye was human in its intelligence. He curvetted, leaped, neighed with joyous spirit and sagacious courage.

As Lucian looked, delighted, on this fine creature, the shy Ethelbert was giving him the full history of the horse and his trials at speeding. The doctor reached the house and mounted the outside stairs of the gallery. He came toward the men at the rail with a silly, aimless smile and glazed eyes. Looking upon him, Lucian detected that odour which at once connects itself with the Chinaman of the slums.

"Faugh!" he thought, "I will buy the horse, for I feel sorry that he has such an owner."

"Shall we time this Cupid?" he asked of the pallid man who had been gazing absently at the group below.

"O yes, O yes," was the quick reply. "You'll find him more than you bargained for, Mr. Beardsley. Sugg, isn't there a drink here? I got up too early."

Some one handed him a bottle, from which he took a long draught. He then sat, more animated, close to the rail to watch the start of Kentucky Cupid.

They were fixing stirrup or saddle when Lu-

cian raised the glass to scan every foot of the track. His vision took in the pasture over which Doctor DeWitt and the roan horse had passed. Here the man's eyes met a sight they would not soon forget.

A woman was running like mad over the pasture grass. She wore no hat and held up her gown to help her speed. Her hair was almost red as the shining flanks of Kentucky Cupid. He could see her very well through the clear glass. Her face was white and her round bosom rose and fell as with angry sobs. Sometimes she stumbled, sometimes she had to stop to breathe, but still she came on and on toward them.

A shout from the Colonel. Kentucky Cupid was to start. The Virginian collected his senses to watch the seconds, but it was a supreme effort. His attention, curiosity, interest, were all with that stumbling creature who ran as one pursued. Her course was straight for the group below him. What tragedy or what comedy brought her so breathlessly? His blood ran swifter in his veins. This was a land for mad impulses and strange happenings.

The horse came on gallantly, easily. There was a great shout from below. Lucian leaned down and called out exultantly:

"Fifty-four and a half! Good colt! He'll bear training. Good horse!"

The woman was now running close against the fence. The Virginian turned to the haggard man beside him.

"I'll buy that horse if we can come to terms. He is good stuff."

"I told you!" cried the doctor. Great drops of sweat stood over his bushy eyebrows. His mouth and fingers worked nervously.

"Your price?" said Lucian impatiently. He could hear footsteps coming up the stairs. Those Lexington men were not asleep. The man before him was evidently making a supreme effort to collect his faculties. He made several attempts to speak, and only mumbled something which sounded like a price in thousands.

"I'll take him," said Lucian, and then a hurrying woman sped in between him and the miserable figure of the man.

It was the woman who ran. Her light print gown was drabbled and grass-stained. Her auburn hair was falling down. Her breath came in pants as does an animal's. She was as frightened as a child, yet her desperation drove her on.

"O sir, you must not listen. He should not sell the horse."

"Go home, and go to hell!" suddenly yelled the doctor. His face was livid.

Steps were coming up hurriedly.

“Go home, I tell you!” came a hideous yell, “the horse is already sold.”

The woman turned her large and pitiful eyes on Lucian. She clutched his sleeve.

“You must not buy him. He is mine, the last thing that my father gave me. He shall not sell him. He does not know what he is doing.”

For comment the madman jumped forward and struck her down. Her face lay on the foot of the Virginian, her abundant hair mercifully covering it.

CHAPTER TWO

A VERY CAITIFF CROWNED WITH CARE

IT was sunset of the same day. The Virginian sat in a comfortable steamer-chair upon the broad portico of Colonel Buckman's brick mansion-house. He had, without the least hesitation, accepted that gentleman's invitation to remain with him a few days and to accompany him into neighbouring counties to see horses upon which the Kentuckian had kept an eye since they were foaled. He had been given a large guest-room on the first floor, and found that his baggage had preceded him from Grafton. He put himself in order and appeared in answer to the tinkle of a bell which he guessed meant the supper of the Kentucky country house.

His brain was still in a whirl after the morning scene. Some one — nay, it was the shy Ethelbert himself — had snatched up the stricken woman at his feet and hurried off with her. He saw strong

hands laid on Dr. DeWitt and heard that curses not loud but deep, accompanied a sharp lecture, while the man was hustled on to his horse. He thought he heard Colonel Buckman's voice in low, fierce execration at the stirrup, then a cut from a whip sent the mare out into the pasture again. The men about Lucian breathed hard for a while and looked moody. There was a curious reservation about the anger of these Kentuckians that Lucian Beardsley did not understand. His blood had welled up hotly and more fiercely than ever before in his life. He was stirred as never before. A mist blinded his eyes and a paralysis clutched at his throat.

The sale went on. A lunch was served in the lower part of the house at noon, a sumptuous meal of fried chicken, beaten biscuits, coffee, strawberry shortcake and sweetcakes. Staid negro women in neat gowns and white aprons waited upon them. Lucian ate and drank while wondering that the others could and did. In him throbbed the sudden consciousness of the tragedy that underlies all human life. He had been belated in getting this consciousness. The world had gone very well with him. His spirit had never before been touched to a fine issue, but he suddenly realized that there were in him strong feelings which he had not known despite his education, travel, worldly wisdom and experiences.

He had skimmed existence as a skater skims over thin ice, while below are depths of death.

After dinner the exhibition and sale went on, but in these activities he now had little inclination or interest. He smoked silently under a great elm tree, wondering what had become of the woman. He respected the proud reserve of the men about him. He felt that he was an alien and she must be protected from impertinent thought as one of themselves. He remembered the look on the thin face of young Sugg as he snatched her away from observation. It was one which might have been depicted upon the face of a Knight of the Round Table, so sorrowful, protecting, and shielding. Yet young Sugg was now among the men the same as ever, awkwardly alert, attentive enough, but with such reservation of speech and attitude as forbade questions.

Lucian Beardsley was startled at his own strange fancies. Thoughts haunted him like disembodied spirits. A woman struck down? Bah! He had seen a hundred drunken drabs in foul places fall and falling, struck down, pushed aside with brutal haste and passion. He had also looked upon dead women of society, whiter, fairer in their burial robes than the lilies and roses and violets with which they were covered.

He had then idly wondered what these maids and matrons of fashion would find ahead of

them, whether they would penetrate a state where the entire falseness of their training would be made manifest to them. Women? Why, women were solely for the pleasure of men who had that tendency as a weakness. It amused some men to woo, to disdain, to choose and dispose of creatures feminine. His twin brother, Fordyce, had that common weakness, but Lucian had not been able to sympathize with his early marriage. He thought his sister-in-law fair but stupid and wholly without the *chic* and vogue that made women at all endurable. The dumb content in the eyes of his twin when they rested upon his wife and children rather exasperated Lucian. The two had grown up without any decided impress from woman, and had done very well. Why should Fordyce have so soon capitulated to the silken string of a petticoat and have mortgaged his life interests to the dictates of a monthly nurse? Lucian had never given marriage a moment's earnest thought. He played the gentleman and paid his way royally. Fordyce had renewed the stock legitimately and the name would live.

The sale was not over until late in the afternoon; then the Eastern man waited for his host who had many arrangements to make. Colonel Buckman was short and red-faced, but he was never flustered or undetermined. He finally

placed Lucian in a much-used buggy and drove him at a spanking pace up a lane to the great house where he was master. A very black negro was in waiting at the front steps, and to him the Colonel confided the guest while he drove his mare on to the house stables himself.

As the guest came out into the wide hall from his room the Colonel was waiting, and beside him stood a tall and spare lady in whose face was that mild yet proud expression rarely seen now save in old portraits hidden in out-of-the-way places. It would not do to apply the word "women" to these dames. There is only one word fitting for them, and that is the lovely one of olden time, "the lady."

"This is my wife, Mr. Beardsley," said the Colonel in a very gentle voice for him ; "she was with Mrs. DeWitt when you arrived."

"I hope you will enjoy your stay," said the wife. Not so much the words but the smile with it warmed Lucian's heart and relieved the terrible tension under which he had been all the afternoon. He answered the smile with one so dazzling that Mrs. Buckman at once coloured shyly. Rarely was seen such a man as Lucian Beardsley in the quiet country houses about Broad Acres.

He was placed at his hostess's right hand at a small, circular table. It had been pushed close

to the porch window and set off with red rosebuds in a crystal vase. Lucian thought it a lovely picture, this dainty, elderly lady serving tea, with her soft, gray hair, her lilac gown, her bits of lace and her dainty apron. He looked from her husband to her. Between them, although they seemed an ill-assorted pair, there were the strong bonds of peace and love.

To her, then, they had brought that poor young creature. Suddenly Lucian realized, with a sick shudder, the full meaning of the morning's scene. That man's wife? God! Were there such things in this place, this festival-spot of all Nature? Were there thorns in the blossoming hedges, cankers on the rose petals? Were there tragedies going on in these wide-windowed houses, stealing through the great corridors and out of the big-hinged doors?

His host was talking horses and politics to an inattentive ear. He managed to reply, but with wandering wits. He was glad, after the meal, to be allowed to sit alone upon the porch for a brief time. The universe had upheaved and he did not know whether he had any footing as yet. He quivered still when he thought of the woman who fell at his feet and the villainous madness of her husband's face.

Presently Mrs. Buckman came out to him and sat near him in a low willow-rocker. With a

sigh of relief Lucian contemplated the faded delicacy of her features. Surely the nipping frosts of adversity had been tempered here. She was like a sweet late rose, a fragile thing whose petals would soon fall. He wanted to question her, but there was that in her manner which defied curiosity.

She spoke, however, in an even, gentle way, of the very subject seething in his brain.

"You will not think of keeping Dr. DeWitt to the sale of that horse, Mr. Beardsley?"

"No, no! But," with a sudden frown, "it would make it easier for me to understand it all. I wanted that horse as soon as I saw him."

"Mrs. DeWitt's father gave the horse to her before he died," replied the lady, quite as evenly as before. "She looks to him to redeem in the future that part of her property that is under a heavy mortgage."

"Is she here?" burst from Lucian with sudden intensity; then, as though half-repentant, "I wonder if you knew how — to a stranger — how it all looked?"

Mrs. Buckman clasped her hands a little nervously.

"O, I can imagine. It is our right sore spot. We are so powerless to do anything, you see."

"Do you mean that such things often happen?" inquired the Virginian unsteadily.

"We all don't know much — only now and then some one has to shelter her for a day or two until the very worst blows over. Ethelbert Sugg ought to have warned you about making any offer for Cupid, but it seems that the doctor told him, last night, that Dulcie had at last consented to the sale. We all thought that he would wear her clear out on it. He has certainly worn out many ideas of hers. When one is very tired resolutions are hard to hold to, Mr. Beardsley."

"How is she? Was she hurt?"

"Her shoulder was sprained and badly bruised. Then the shock. But, you know, women look frail and are really enduring."

She spoke slowly.

Lucian Beardsley felt that his mind was as that of an octopus, thrusting forth a hundred tentacles of wonder to grasp at dreadful facts. He arose, lit another cigar, and walked over to the railing.

"My dear Mrs. Buckman," he said softly, "my mother and father died in the infancy of my twin brother and myself. My grandmother I barely remember, and I have no near female relatives. I have not known much of women for all my mingling with society, and never of such a woman as you are. I burn, yes, really burn, to ask questions of you, but I fear that you may

think me curious and with an idle motive. Believe me, it is not so."

Mrs. Buckman had a delicate flush on her cheeks as she said quite slowly:

"You were too much moved. You would have struck him, maybe killed him. Why did you feel that?"

"No ignoble rage," he replied quickly, "and I only know from you what I really did. I passed out of myself."

"A generous rage and good motive," she went on, musingly, "but as dangerous to her as a blighting wind. No breath has ever hurt Dulcie's good name. She is here now, but I have sent for Dr. DeWitt to take her home at once."

"My God!" cried Lucian. His cigar fell away. "To-night?"

"To-night," said the gentle, firm voice, "she must be under her husband's roof. You are our guest. O, my friend, I am sure that you will understand me when I say that no trouble she has had would be as one she has not. Now we all weep with her while we all respect her and pray for her."

"But she is surely safe with you," he gasped, "with you, and this little respite only until another day? Madame, I cannot understand. I will go away."

She sat up quite rigidly and folded her hands firmly over her lilac gown.

"Mr. Beardsley, we are very careful of our women's honour in Kentucky. Dulcie is to me almost like my own child, yet I must send her home any night she comes here. She knows it. She will not expect to stay to bring trouble on any of her father's old friends."

A merciless mood swept over the man. His voice rang out like a trumpet peal.

"Wait! I may be mistaken somehow. Here is a woman married to a man who is maddened by excessive use of drugs, liquors, and what not. He certainly abuses her. You all know it, you all deplore it, you all grieve over it, but you let it go on and you will not shelter her in your houses at night for fear of—what? Is it trouble with the madman, or because of saving her reputation?"

"Both," replied Mrs. Buckman, earnestly; "you see, it is a forbidden thing to come between man and wife. Even her own father refused to meddle."

"And her church — of which you spoke?"

"The Protestant Episcopal Church does not believe in such interferences. We all can't do one thing for Dulcie, Mr. Beardsley. We all," lowering her voice, "can't do anything but hope that there will be a release. They say that drugs like those kill in a little while, and we all have been actually hoping for something to happen."

Somewhere Lucian Beardsley had read a phrase which suddenly blazed out before his thought.

"Held in the grasp of the Omnipotent!"

"I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Buckman," he continued after a silence. "That man is not going to die for a long time, unless by an accident. He is like the Hindoo and Chinese priests, skilful enough in the use of those accursed preparations of opium and cocaine to become a human mummy. Some of those men live over a hundred years. And for her — why, she must be rescued. Let her friends help her to a divorce."

Mrs. Buckman arose and clutched his arm, looking about fearfully.

"Hush!" she whispered, "she might hear you. That was the whisper of the devil."

She was trembling from head to foot.

"Madame, I did not mean to agitate you. Forgive me. Divorces are common now. O, I only make it worse. I will not mention it again."

"Do not," she breathed excitedly. "I feel assured that you meant no harm. The devil enters men's souls when they do not guess it. He breathes forth evil in a single word, a phrase. You know not what terrible thing you have said, for you have been orphaned and without woman's good influence. I will pray for you that you may not ever mention that word again."

"Again pardon me," he said very gently. "We will drop the subject after one or two questions. How long after their marriage before the doctor took up his habits? Have they any children?"

"The children are dead, mercifully," she shuddered; "as to the other —" here she breathed heavily again — "O, it is a pitiful thing, but it is now known that he had the habit before; that his own father hurried on the marriage with the hope that he would break off, and so it has ever been. My poor Dulcie!"

A deep execration burst from Lucian Beard-sley's lips. He was again at white heat.

"Fraud, fraud!" he was saying between his teeth as he paced the porch up and down.

"Another sadness of it is that he has dissipated her estate. He wears her out to do this or that. She has put herself down to the farm superintendence in order to keep up a living — he has no more practice; she is a dear woman, but it seems worse than useless. Colonel Buckman says she is not suited to any hard tasks. Dulcie needs to be upheld, not to uphold any burden. But there — you will now understand, and I am sure that you will oblige me by withdrawing when the doctor comes, as he soon will, to take his wife home."

The little iciness in her tone did not escape him.

"I think I should much enjoy a smoke in the quiet of the garden," he said at once. "May I get my hat and have a walk?"

"The Colonel has a sick stable-boy on hand," she made instant reply, "but, as soon as he comes in, I will send him into the grounds to find you. He carries a silver dog-whistle, and here is mine for you."

She detached it from a little chain at her belt. Lucian passed to his room. Whether he took the wrong turn or not he never knew, but he drew up suddenly before a half-open door. At a low dressing-table sat a pallid woman. A middle-aged negress was combing out long, lustrous waves of red-gold hair. A face showed in the mirror. It was a terrified, woeful face, and across the brow there was a dark bruise. The next moment Lucian Beardsley hurried past Mrs. Buckman on the portico and plunged, hatless, down the entrance avenue. It was not so dark but he could guide himself to one side of the grove after a short walk and find a rough bench upon which he sat down in a turmoil of astounded despair.

Furious, hot anger shook him. He could have clutched the neighbourhood as one man and shaken it for detested cowardice. A brave land this, where a woman could be held in such persecution and durance vile, and where no one

dared or cared to aid her! Vagrant thoughts of the old fairy tales beset him. "O sweet, white lady, hard in the grasp of a horrible ogre, a fairy prince should seek thee out and slay the iron hand that holds thee fast!" That was mad folly in these practical days, but there must be some release. God never intended any weak creature to be bounden thrall to sin and vice, if there was a God. There was not any parallel to this atrocity in all Nature. The female animal fights valiantly for every right.

If fear, deadly fear, ever sat upon a human countenance it was upon that one that looked into the mirror with eyes unseeing as he passed. Her tyrant was coming after her. She knew it. God in heaven, if there was a God, have mercy upon her!

There was soon a sound of wheels. Some one drove into the avenue and past him as he sat in the shadow of a clump of lilac-bushes. No need to ask who it was. Devoid of shame, sustained by public feeling, the victim of his own weakness and passions passed on to carry home his helpless prey.

In order to see them as they repassed, the stranger had but to seek a clump of cedars nearer the gate. It was not long to wait. The woman had been made ready. Nearer came the clattering wheels, the horse dashed past. There

was only a faint glimpse of a shrouded head, but it changed the whole current of his thought.

There was so little of vice he had not viewed in a study of dissipation. He had a faint idea of scenes that could be enacted at Glen Farm, of tortures that this woman could be made to undergo. It sickened him. O, for the white purity enthroned in those pitiful eyes! It would make a strong man weak to remember it.

The meaning of marriage had never really occupied Lucian Beardsley's thoughts. Strange that it should rise within him now even as the glorious moon rose over the park. Marriage? Well, he knew something of its semblances and its substitutes. He had taken his pleasure as a gentleman, with all discretion and fair play. He would have as soon thought of suicide as a scandal. His follies had been a succession of emotional flights which he took care should never sully innocence or wrong actual trust. One female creature who had become his partner in a co-operative housekeeping scheme in Brooklyn had developed an unexpected honesty, fidelity and discretion. Her qualities disturbed him to the extent that he went to Cuba without the formality of a farewell and wrote her from there of his abandonment and a provision for her. He was nearer loneliness for a month than ever before, and was lonelier than ever when he re-

ceived news of her death in a hospital from a fever. In this Kentucky moonlight the wraith of that wan woman who had been the occupant of the flat in Brooklyn came near to him, whispered to him as never in her life, bade him know strange mysteries, entangled the feet of his errant thoughts in the waves of her brown hair. She had been humble and patient. He wondered, if he had ever given her intense meekness one word of real tenderness, what waters of intense feeling would have gushed forth. He gave her credit now for a host of qualities he had denied her in life, and he absolved her past in the ocean of the last entire devotion to himself.

The moonlight lay between two tree trunks, a broad shaft of radiance over his feet. So had a lovely woman been prone before him that morning and he had not lifted her up. Now — he clenched his fists at the very thought — she could be in worse plights and he dared not lift her up.

A crashing footstep came nearer. It was the Colonel's in hot haste.

"I've whistled for you half a dozen times, Beardsley. You must have been asleep."

"Sit down," said Lucian, taking the cigar he offered. "Sit down and drive away the ghosts. The night is full of them."

CHAPTER THREE

THOU HAST NO TONGUE TO TELL WHO MARTYRED THEE

MRS. BUCKMAN fears that she has hurt your feelings," began the Kentuckian.

"O," promptly returned Lucian Beardsley, "I do not mind confessing that your tolerated tragedy here has upset me completely."

"Strong language," replied the Colonel. "Surely you have seen abused mothers and children and wives in your cities?"

"We hear of them in the proceedings of police courts and the records of the whipping-posts," said Lucian dryly, "but there is no toleration by a community, sir."

"This is the most public thing that has ever happened," began the Colonel, humbly, "and he was particularly savage this morning. Otherwise, we know so little about it that we can only surmise more. She never speaks of it."

"What use?" broke in Lucian. "She spares herself the indignity of your disbelief or your inaction. Pardon me, but I am hardly myself."

"We may not be active enough," said the other man, cautiously, "but grant that if we desire to act, we can not do anything. She is his wife."

"License to spend her worldly goods, to hate, to impoverish, to abuse, to hold while life lasts; and whom the devil has joined together, let no man put asunder. That's wedlock in this country, is it?"

"Horrible!" exclaimed the old Kentuckian. "Mr. Beardsley, you must not mock at marriage. I grant it is all or nothing as one makes it, but what goodness exists and endures in a man is generally put there by a good woman. I feel," said he, baring his brow to the moonlight, "that I should always take off my own hat when I speak my wife's name and that all the world should do the same."

"Amen," said Lucian heartily, "but, ye gods, what misfits we do find! This travesty on marriage we have now seen. How came it? Was that woman ever in love with that man at his best?"

The Colonel waited a moment and then replied soberly:

"I don't think that she was. Hers has always been a peculiar nature. She is like a child who goes on a pitiful quest and comes back without anything. We were anxious to see her well

married, her father most of all. Delby DeWitt came home from a Pennsylvania college and set up a practice. He was different from others about here, and Dulcie was quite carried away with him. It was not a year after the marriage before strange tales went about. Questioned, Dulcie refused to say a word. Her own father admired this silent martyrdom, and he died beseeching her to be steadfast in it. I believe it will kill her finally, as it has killed her children."

"Do you mean to tell me that she never complains?" cried Lucian, "not to your wife, not to any one else who might give her a little consolation? O no, no, that were against all Nature!"

"It is true," replied the Colonel, much moved. "She is strangely enduring, loyally strong. We were surprised to hear her say what she said this morning. It was wrung from her."

"How old is she?" asked Lucian.

"About twenty-seven. She looks aged by her trouble. My wife says she has gray hairs already. My wife hopes that he may die, but I've read that opium-eaters rarely die early, though, of course, there's cocaine too."

"There is little hope for her," observed Lucian, after a long pause. "I offended Mrs. Buckman by alluding to a divorce."

"You could not offend her half as much in

any other way," replied the older man. "She will not hear divorce mentioned. We have enough of it, God knows, in our midst, and yet I confess I must think of it with toleration in such a case as Dulcie's. I heard our late rector say that she would be right in securing it. DeWitt is strangely immoral, but she does not know that. I don't know who would tell her, to add to her troubles."

"Since you have introduced that subject," said Lucian coolly, "I would like to add a few bits of information out of my knowledge of cocaine fiends in the East, Colonel."

When he stopped his hearer was pale with horror and dismay.

"If I thought our little Dulcie—" he began, then he boiled over with good honest rage and swore like a trooper.

"I'm glad I have aroused you from your apathy," observed Lucian. "I came down here to buy a horse and I have found a righteous cause ready to my hand. What was Mrs. DeWitt's maiden name, Colonel?"

"Childress — Dulcinea Childress," said the Colonel.

"Childress!" repeated Lucian with a start. "Childress? Colonel, my grandfather's Kentucky mother was a Willa Childress."

"By the Lord Harry!" said the Colonel slowly.

Lucian's voice was hoarse. He threw out all his repressed feeling in jerky sentences.

"Good God! That woman may be my kinswoman though far removed. If you think I am going to leave Kentucky with the thought of any woman related to me in the clutches of a demon and a drug fiend, you do not know me or my brother Fordyce. Forgive me, Colonel. You are my host, but this thing has seethed me all day. I swear to you that this woman, if she is a cousin many times removed, shall have in me a protector and a counsellor. I care nothing for your petty county society, nothing for your gossip, your scandal. I have the money, and I can buy the influence. Shut up your doors to this poor, miserable creature if you will, and, as you do it, I will free her from that man, and I will put any happiness I can into her miserable, wasted life."

He had risen, and he stood up in the moonlight like a triumphant god. The old Colonel sprang up and seized his hand. His eyes were full of honest tears.

"Beardsley, Beardsley, don't you know you make me feel that we are all a set of infernal cowards and jackanapes? Yes, you do!"

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Lucian Beardsley slept long the next morning. Stirred as never before, his complex emotions had

exhausted him. He slept through the quiet night hours, the rosy, pearly dawn, the sunrise, the breakfast time. Mrs. Buckman would not allow him to be disturbed. Not a servant tiptoed over the porch that ran around the house, not a foot-fall sounded in the hallways. She was glad of time to reflect herself, and she thought it the best wisdom that rest complete should knit up the ravelled sleeve of the new care in the Virginian's mind and calm his hot impulses. Had he been a mere boy these would not have given her much real concern, but Lucian Beardsley was a matured man of the world, and she had every reason to respect a man's fixed determinations.

Lucian had fallen asleep thinking of the Colonel's sober words at the close of their conversation:

"You must not expect me to keep this matter from my wife, Beardsley. It is many years since I held back anything from her. I could not do it if I tried, I believe."

"I do not ask that," Lucian had replied, "but will it make any difference in her attitude? Would she not concede me the honest right to defend a kinswoman?"

"A thousand times, yes," replied the Colonel. "No one is more of a believer in ties of blood than is Mrs. Buckman. If you are descended from the same stock it will make all the difference in the

world. I advise you to say nothing of a divorce to my wife unless she attacks you on the subject. If she does, you will understand how to act. My wife has a high belief in most people, and it is a personal sorrow to her to have any one fall below her own pure standard."

"I like to hear you say those things," went on Lucian. "They remind me of certain feelings of reverence I once had, when a lad, before some of the great pictures and the stained-glass saints in Europe. I had almost forgotten the feeling, but it is revived by your words. Good-night, my dear sir."

He woke when the sun was high in the heavens. At first he lay half dozing in a drowsy luxury. The room was like a green bower. All the shutters were closed, but the wind through the slats waved the long muslin curtain-pieces backward and forward. They seemed the draperies of fleeing nymphs in a woodland. Once in a while a bird chirped in the rose vine outside or a bee buzzed up against the shutters. When he grew wider awake he remembered where he had been yesterday and the events of the night. He felt creeping over him a strange new sensation of a realized epoch. He was not only all he had ever been, but something more, some one who would live nearer other men's lives and better understand their great passions and their great pains.

He touched the bell and the black man who came to prepare his bath brought him a cup of coffee which reminded Lucian of his old days in France. He made his toilet slowly, trying to shape a definite action and at once begin the work of rescue and alleviation. He decided to go to Dulcie at once, but it was a case of man proposing and Mrs. Buckman disposing. She was evidently watching for his appearance from the front door, for she came into the wide hall as he came down stairs, to bid him good-morning and ask him how he had slept. It was very warm, and she wore a white gown as simple as that of a child. There was a quiet calmness in her eyes that belied the Colonel's twinkle. He greeted Lucian from his Shaker rocker at one side of the porch table. At his side stood a tall glass of mint julep, and all the ingredients for this fragrant beverage were before him.

"You've come just in time," called out the Colonel. "Sit down and Mrs. Buckman shall make you the finest julep in Kentucky. You can stand it after your coffee. Dinner will soon be ready and, after that, you and I are going to take a neat little drive of sixteen miles across the country, sir."

Lucian took the chair at the railing and watched the fragile little hands of the mistress of the house go fluttering skilfully about over

shaved ice and crushed mint, sugar, lemon and the cut-glass decanters of old Kentucky whisky. It amused him to remember with what horror some of her own sex would regard these pretty services, how she would be condemned for them and blamed in some rigid circles of that outer world of which she had so little knowledge. He testified to the merits of the julep in warm terms a few moments later. Here was a woman to study. She believed in a personal devil, would hear nothing of divorce, but she mixed a julep that would coax a saint out of Paradise.

"We all are going over to look at Manifold's fine colts this afternoon," said the Colonel in his most genial manner, "and as Peter Manifold married Nancy Childress, a second cousin of Mrs. DeWitt's, it is quite as well that we make some inquiries there. Mrs. Buckman thinks that Nancy had some old documents and letters that will likely help you to prove your ancestry."

Lucian flushed.

"I am sorry I am among such strangers that my word requires proof," he said in his most spirited manner.

"Tut, tut, tut, man!" cried the Colonel. "You want the real proof yourself, don't you? There used to be several branches of the Childress family about here and one or two people of the

name who were no relation whatever to any of the old lot. As I say, Peter will surely let us see those letters and old things that Nancy's father left her. Peter would not let Dulcie have the papers after Nancy died. You see, Dulcie and Nancy didn't agree."

"This Nancy Childress is dead?"

"Three years. Peter is married again. His last wife has real good sense and was educated at Milersburg. I like Kitty May myself."

"I had made another plan," began the younger man. He saw a look pass between the husband and wife, one as quick as lightning.

"I want you to go over there," continued the Colonel easily, "because it will probably settle the question as to whether you can claim any kin to Mrs. DeWitt. We don't want you to go to see her until we are sure you are right, Beardsley."

Lucian flushed and then waited to recover himself.

"There is some justice in that desire of yours. I am willing to go with you, but, after that, I must be allowed my own will, especially as I shall soon leave your hospitable roof. I may have to do some things that will not please our gentle lady here, and so I cannot courteously remain for even the time I had promised."

Mrs. Buckman folded her hands again and there came a delicate flush on her cheek.

"I know. If you come back from over the river with the knowledge that Mrs. DeWitt is your kinswoman, you intend to see her and to make it all known to her," she said a little unsteadily.

"I certainly intend so to do, my dear Mrs. Buckman."

"In that case I want you to see her here, with me. I believe in Dulcie. She has been wonderfully upheld in many ways. I believe — indeed, I do hope that she will resist you and all your offers, Mr. Beardsley."

In all his life Lucian Beardsley had never met such unqualified defiance as now blazed forth in Susan Buckman's large eyes. They were like cold, bluish steel. A fierce, unreasoning obstinacy, shook him, but he bowed his head.

"You do me honour, Mrs. Buckman. I hardly know what sort of a foeman I might make. You may be right, but still I shall make the effort to induce my kinswoman to cease this useless self-sacrifice and suicidal martyrdom."

Mrs. Buckman began to gather up the glasses with the cool reply:

"It may be, Mr. Beardsley, that you will discover no kinship. That would delight me greatly, as then you would have no excuse to take up her cause."

"None whatever," replied Lucian quietly,

“unless it was a desire to save a fellow-mortal — a woman at that — from so much pain and misery.”

The Colonel rose quickly, relieved at the sound of the silvery bell in the hall.

“Dinner, dinner! I know our guest is hungry. I wish DeWitt was ten feet deep in yonder graveyard, for my part, yes, I do!”

The meal was eaten with a careful avoidance of dangerous topics. An hour later the Colonel and his guest were hurrying across the country behind two blooded mares. Lucian's spirits rose with the rapid drive down green lanes, over good and bad turnpikes, narrow dirt cross-cuts and through the swift river at a ford that the mares did not at all fancy. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they drove into Peter Manifold's farm lane and stopped before a two-story wooden house with broad galleries running completely around both stories. Climbing roses embowered the house and yellow honeysuckle mingled with them and scented all the air. There seemed to be half a hundred dogs about, and they all came forward to bark very joyously at the strangers.

A coloured man, strangely sad of face, stood at the head of the sweating mares. Their host appeared at an opening in the vines. He was tall, lank, sweet of voice and gentle in manner. He welcomed them as though they had been long

expected, and Lucian Beardsley could not have believed that here was a man who would hold back from Dulcie DeWitt the meagre records of her ancestry.

The guests were established in wooden rockers on the lower gallery and supplied with palm-leaf fans.

"We want to see your colts, Peter," began the Colonel, after a social chat, "but first thing of all, this gentleman here is of the opinion that his great-grandmother was a Childress of your wife Nancy's branch. He is out here from New York, and is studying out his own pedigree on the side while buying good horses. Can't you all show him those old letters and small tricks that Nancy had and set such store by?"

"Just wait a minute, Colonel," broke in Lucian. "If Mr. Manifold has anything of importance to me, he can name his price for it if he wants money."

Peter was plainly puzzled.

"Nancy never did want Dulcinea DeWitt to have those things just because she wanted them so much. You all don't want them for her, do you, Colonel?"

"I do not know her," promptly replied Lucian to spare the Colonel; "this quest is all in my own interests. My great-grandfather married a Willa Childress, here in Kentucky, about 1800."

"Well, I'll just stir up Kitty May," said the Kentuckian, retreating into the house. Kitty May presently appeared. She had hurriedly put herself into one of her boarding-school gowns, and, as Kitty May was now much stouter than in her maiden days, it looked to the Virginian as if it must fly wide apart if Kitty May breathed or laughed naturally. But Kitty May was still very young and very pretty, and she had with her a diminutive infant in long clothes that so distracted her mind from the ordinary affairs of life that it was some time before she could be brought to understand just what was wanted of her.

"Those old letters and tricks of Nancy's? Law, Colonel, did you all see the baby's chin dimple? Those old things? Let me see. I haven't seen them since the baby came — nor a long time before. They must be in that closet in the front room up-stairs. Go get them, Peter. I don't like to leave Eustace a single minute. Now, Colonel, I always said to Peter, 'You all are doing a mighty small thing to keep those few tricks from Dulcie DeWitt. Dulcie's got more trouble than any one, and do let her have 'em.' I'd have sent them to her, Colonel, only Peter swore that Nancy would get up out of her grave after him, and I didn't want to be badly scared while I was nursing baby. It might hurt him, you know."

All this was said with a most charming and innocent air. Lucian felt his heart go out to her when she spoke of the woman in whose fate he had already become interested. It was plainly to be seen that Kitty May was the queen of the Manifold domain. Peter at once went up the outside stairs at her bidding, while an obsequious young coloured girl stood before her mistress's chair and fanned her proudly.

It was a pretty sight, this fair young mother and her tiny infant. She caressed its rose-leaf hands and smiled above it like a happy child.

"Peter's old nurse, Mammy Reba, is mighty jealous because I must have baby all to myself, Colonel. I say to her how could any one give up such a sweet thing? I don't know what I would do with my time if I'd let her nurse it. I would eat my heart right out looking on."

Peter descended the stairs empty-handed.

"Now where are those things?" demanded his small spouse.

"There's no sign of them in that old cupboard," retorted Peter, aggrieved. "I nevah did see such mess of traps, anyhow."

Kitty May's eyes flashed fire.

"Peter, I believe you are afraid that Nancy will rise on you. I'm not afraid of ghosts. I'll get that box and you all had just better send it

over to Dulcie De Witt by the Colonel. We certainly have got old plunder enough around without that."

She handed the baby to the young girl, caught up her blue silk gown and ran lightly up the stairs. In a short time she ran down, breathless, but with an old black box tied up with cord and shoestrings.

She stood before Lucian, laughing gaily.

"I guess you all are the only one left who has any right to open this box," she exclaimed. "I'll say you all shall open it, anyhow."

The two cut and untied strings for a few moments, then Lucian lifted the lid with a feeling of awe and wonder.

A packet of yellow, time-stained letters lay there, an old leather wallet, a tiny French Testament with the covers eaten away by insects, a curious medal from some religious order, battered and bitten, its letters illegible save part of a phrase, "le bon Dieu."

"A tin penny!" cried Kitty May. "Not a thing worth while!"

Lucian looked into the wallet. There were several strands of hair braided together — black, brown, golden, and all tied with worn bits of ribbon. There was a folded paper, yellow and brown spotted and also worn at the edges. It was a sort of family record of the American branch of the

Childress family and kept up in a half-dozen handwritings.

Lucian's heart rose in his mouth. Crudely put together, here was a priceless treasure. Here was the truth of time:

Bogardus et Huon Childress out of France, 1749. Bogardus dwelt alone in ye boundless wilderness six years. Huon dwelt in South Carolina more than six years. An Indian had dwelt with Bogardus raised in ye deep wilderness, baptized to be his own son and heir, he being a man unwed. Huon followed his brother in six years with Blanchflor his wife, six children, to-wit, Blanch, Clotaire, Fidele, Remy, Anselm, Aimée. Of these all did die save Blanchflor and Remy.

Here the writing changed to one feminine:

Remy wed with Mary Wren after the War of the Colonies with England sent men and women over the mountains. Before this time Bogardus Childress, the Indian son of Bogardus, wed with Blanchflor, the daughter of Huon. Of Bogardus Childress and Blanchflor Childress came Stephan and Willa Childress. Of Remy one son, to-wit, Adelbert.

Then another hand had written plainly:

Stephan Childress wed one Gertrude de Heath; Willa Childress, one Fordyce Beardsley, of Virginia. She died in childbirth, leaving a male child, Fordyce, whose record is lost.

Of Remy Childress's heirs, they are scattered widely and we know nothing.

Of Stephan Childress's heirs, there are his son Gilbert, of

whose heirs there are: Salome, Hertzell and Philip Carleton Childress and Guy Childress. The Hertzell record has not been established, but Philip Carleton Childress had many children, to-wit: Charles Louis, Stephan, Gilbert and Dulcinea DeWitt. None there are living but the daughter. God took the sons when children. Guy Childress had heirs, one Leroy who died in California, and Nancy Manifold.

This record, though in different handwritings, was clear and plain. Lucian handed it over to Colonel Buckman and turned to Peter, trembling in spite of his efforts to be calm.

"That record is worth thousands of dollars to me. Will you sell it?"

Peter took his pipe from his mouth and stared at the stranger without replying. Kitty May had turned again to the baby who was still in the arms of the nurse, but making purposeless and ineffectual plunges at his mother, while ecstatic smiles hovered about his tiny mouth. Kitty was in raptures. She forgot everything.

"Those papers do look all right," pronounced the Colonel, after a scrutiny. "I guess you've found about what you wanted. Funny thing how that old wallet has held together. I wonder whose hair that is?"

"We may be able to determine later," observed Lucian, still much moved. "Colonel, this means a great deal to me. My great-grandfather was this very Fordyce Beardsley, you under-

stand. It seems like a dream. His son was my own grandfather who visited Kentucky when about my age. He learned some of the family history then, but if he had only known of this record, it would have been a sacred duty to him to have found it."

"Clear as water," pronounced the Colonel. I knew Philip Childress, Dulcie's father. He was a great deal like an Indian himself in some ways: He could endure more and keep stiller than any man I ever saw. Why," continued the Colonel, his eyes flashing, "he was wounded at Chickamauga, and, by the Lord, Beardsley, he sat on his mare until the blood followed his path. We all had to pull him off, sir, to make him go to the rear. That's Indian. Dulcie's like him. That's where she gets her endurance. Blood will tell."

A wave of feeling swept over the younger man. He gazed dumbly at the black box and the letters. At that moment Peter Manifold recovered from his amazement enough to drawl out in his singularly sweet voice:

"You offah a thousand dollahs for the lettahs, sir?"

"I do," replied Lucian promptly.

There was then a strange sound that made them all turn. Kitty May had made a sudden spring at the group. Her blue gown could not

stand the strain and burst several hooks and eyes. Kitty May ran back and snatched up the babe to shield her, pressing its yellow, downy head against her panting bosom.

"Sell those things, Peter?" she said, in a withering voice. "Sell them? Well, I think not."

Colonel Buckman drew his breath with a queer, inaudible chuckle. Peter looked frightened.

"Now, Colonel," began the pretty, flushed creature, "you all know we Mays are square folks. We forgot to keep our pedigrees, and I don't suppose your wife will ever forget my larks and pranks at the church picnics. Law, don't you get red, Colonel! I was only enjoying myself and I never could keep the boys away. But we Mays are square. Eustace's pa is never going to sell those things to any New Yorker, if he's lined with money. I haven't a thing against you," she added, turning to the stranger. "You may be a Childress or anybody else, but no one is going to carry those little tricks out of this house — except to Dulcie DeWitt — with my consent."

"They are not yours," cried Peter, wrathfully. "They were Nance's! They aren't yours at all."

"Nance is dead or I wouldn't be here," retorted Kitty May. "She is dead and, if she is in Heaven, she is probably wishing she had made it up with Dulcie. Angels haven't got any mean

feelings. As for her rising up, which I'm bound to say you are mortal afraid she'll do, Peter, she surely will rise if you pass those things on to a pure stranger. I just won't have that thing told on you, Peter. We'll drop the whole matter like it was lead, and the Colonel'll pack that stuff over to Dulcie with your compliments as a gentleman."

"I won't do it!" declared Peter, very red in the face. "Women are a deuce of a business, interfering like this. Befoah a stranger, too. What will he think of Kentucky women aftah this, Kitty May?"

Kitty May laughed in his face.

"He'll think the men would be a mighty poor lot without them, won't he? If you won't send the stuff, I will. Just carry it along, Colonel Buckman. I can trust you all. Tell Dulcie De-Witt, Mr. Peter Manifold sends it, and he hopes the hard feeling is over for all time. And just tell her, too, that Mrs. Manifold would like to have her come over and see the baby real soon."

The fat and red-faced Colonel looked at Peter. He gave in very reluctantly and like an obstinate child.

"I don't suppose I'd have any peace, gentlemen, if I kept them," he said, "but Nance was against it to the day of her death."

"She isn't bossing things on the place now," observed Kitty May, with a beaming smile, "and you'll feel real good over this to-morrow, dear. Mammy Reba says the best way to lay 'harnts' is to plumb defy 'em and they'll quit you. I never do see any myself."

"Let us go look at the colts, Colonel," broke in Lucian. "I hope to be able, some way, to put my name to a check for Mr. Manifold."

The Colonel almost tumbled down the steps he was so pleased.

"I hope you all will be able to buy something in Kentucky," he shouted with laughter, "but it seems that you've got the women against you. Come on, dear fellow, and let us hunt a colt with a pedigree longer than your own."

Peter had lingered a moment, and Lucian, looking backward, saw Kitty May give him a warm kiss ere she pushed him away from her.

"Your women, collectively, are most puzzling, Colonel," he observed; "it will be a relief to take my mind from them and put it on the colts — if I can."

"I'll back them up against the whole world!" cried the Colonel, "both the Kentucky women and the Kentucky colts!"

CHAPTER FOUR

SHE IS MY GOODS, MY CHATTELS

AN hour later a slim negro lad shyly approached Mr. Peter Manifold sitting upon a feed box in an open stable-shed and announced supper in a decidedly frightened voice.

Mr. Manifold had recovered his usual cheerfulness. He had sold Mr. Lucian Beardsley a fine black saddle horse at a generous figure. The three men were now watching the grooming of the horse for his departure. Colonel Buckman declared that they could easily take him with them, ride and lead. Lucian Beardsley was calmed down, feeling that he had made full recompense to Mr. Manifold in the price of the horse. He walked about among the stable-men, scattering coin and much enjoying their admiration and homage. These country negroes interested him far more than any coloured people he had seen in cities. In their dark faces there was a

strange and pathetic appeal he could not overlook. So he sought to answer it by bestowing indiscriminate charity, and enjoyed the "Lawd do bress ye, massa!" which seemed fervent and spontaneous.

It was evident that Kitty May had not been idle while they were absent. A table set in the large and bare dining-room fairly groaned with an intemperate hospitality. There were great platters of fried chicken, a sweet hot bread that melted in the mouth, potato puffs, jellies, pickles, salads, preserves, cakes, strawberries of a size that made Lucian stare, and home-made ice-cream. For drinks they had coffee, iced tea and iced claret. Mr. Peter Manifold explained to Colonel Buckman that Kitty May had demanded an ice-house the year before, and had herself superintended the cutting from the creek and the filling of the house during the past winter.

"Law! It gave the niggers a job of work," cried Kitty May from the head of the table, "and they have to work hard. I don't want to see them around starving and doing nothing. Give them work, I say. Then it's most comforting to us to have the ice."

Sensible, sweet little mind. It went straight to the root of all evils and tried to remedy them. This was another type of Kentucky woman, a wholesome one that needed little culture to grasp

the issues of the day and to see the work that lay to hand. Lucian Beardsley saw clearly what manner of man Eustace might become with a heritage of such common-sense, courage, and high honour.

He wondered if Dulcie was such a woman. Surely, he was setting forth to defend a will-o'-the-wisp. She was not as pretty as Kitty May, probably never had been, but she had a certain beauty intangible, a charm, a fascination, that little Mrs. Manifold did not have and could not appreciate. He remembered a scene in a French theatre when a regally beautiful woman had been scorned by listless applause and hired encores, and that, after her, a shy, unformed girl slipped from the wings and stood suddenly before them — and that something, something in her level outlook, her personality, had gone straight to the hearts of men so that the applause began and rose and continued ere she spoke or moved. Her's was men's beauty, the "beauty of the devil," and poor Dulcie DeWitt also had it, even though now she was like a flower with a worm at its heart.

It was well towards dusk ere they were ready for their return trip. The dancing mares were scattering the gravel on the roadway, the sad-faced negro was holding the black horse. Lucian thought he would ride a part of the way at least, and he vaulted into the saddle after the most

courteous of farewells to Kitty May. The Colonel got into the buggy, but no word was spoken of the black box. They were out of sight of the house before he dared to question the Colonel.

"Did she give you the letters, Colonel?"

The Colonel took his cigar from his lips and laughed.

"O yes, my dear, good fellow! I can kick the box with my heel now. Trust Mistress Kitty May. She is always a woman of her word."

"She is delicious!" acquiesced Lucian. "I really feel thankful that she is Mrs. Manifold. I do not think I could hold out against Kitty May should she lay siege to me."

"Siege to you!" roared the Colonel. "From what heathen lands do you come? She was simply the talk of the county with all the men after her. I don't see how Manifold got her. I don't believe he knows himself. She is the best wife in the world to him. He's got a latent lung complaint and will probably leave her a young widow."

"Ye gods!" cried Lucian. "And then, and then?"

The Colonel roared with merriment again.

"Beardsley, we have got a great many wonderful things in our state besides our politics and our Mammoth Cave. I believe I agree with statesmen and common people when I say that the most wonderful is the Kentucky

widow. Our women are gay young girls, but not reckless. Our wives are unsurpassed and seldom fickle. Our widows are beyond conception, sir, beyond conception and description!"

"I am deeply interested," exclaimed Lucian, his eyes dancing.

"Our widows, Mr. Beardsley, have the charm of the reticent maid, with the knowledge of the loving wife. They have read the one man well, and have the key to all others. They consider homage their right, they are gay, with a suspicion of daring — and — and, sir, they can take care of themselves on all occasions."

"This is the woman's kingdom," quoth the Virginian. "I have given women more thought in one day since I came into Kentucky than in my whole life before, sir."

With such converse they took their way homeward. They passed swiftly through the magical twilight. Lucian's mount was a happiness to him. Never before had he so enjoyed a ride. The Colonel gave him sage advice about his riding and the care of a good horse. They crossed at the ford while it was yet light enough to see the way, which the Colonel knew by the location of trees upon the bank. After an hour or two Lucian went into the buggy with the Colonel and led his purchase by a long strap. This gave them a better opportunity to talk.

"You have certainly established your kinship to Dulcie," said the Colonel, "and do you still think you will see her and endeavour to influence her to leave DeWitt? Do not answer if you do not wish to. I want you to remember that you will take a great responsibility if you do."

"I think I shirk a greater one if I do not. See here, Colonel, I do not want to dispute with you on any subject, least of all on this one. I want to try to do this thing fairly and honestly. You must allow me to meet my cousin, we will say, at your house, and very soon, perhaps to-morrow. Mrs. Buckman can be present, and she can plead with her. I will not even state my case. I will simply ask her if I can help her to be any happier. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

The Colonel sighed.

"My wife will be in a great deal of trouble about it. She is a person of the strongest convictions. She keeps all our rectors to the rigid path of duty, yet she is their warmest supporter, financially as well as morally. The one we have now is too meek and she resents that."

"A former rector is the one who pitied my cousin so much, was he not?" asked Lucian.

"Yes. He was much interested and too liberal in his ideas. However, there was other trouble, and after he made up his mind to go to a Virginia parish, he spoke too much about

it and deeply offended the conservative element."

"Mrs. Buckman is, without doubt, a great power in the congregation," observed Lucian. He was sounding the depths now.

"Yes, indeed. They cannot run on without her. Some one has to be the motive power in the parish. They tell a good story on one of our rectors, an English importation. He was an ass, Beardsley. None of us were good enough for him. When you see our church you will notice our fine pulpit. It was carved by an artist in the East, and the ladies bought it, and are very proud of it. Now, this Rev. Buthric Symes was a very small man, and his nose barely reached over the pulpit. While they were trimming the church for Christmas one year, this man came into the chancel. A wreath of holly had been placed about the pulpit top.

" 'I won't be able to see over that at all,' he said to my wife; 'that pulpit is too high anyhow. It ought to be cut down or the church buy a new one.'

"Mrs. Buckman was making a wreath near him, and she spoke right up:

" 'Do you think so? I think it would be much easier to get a new rector.' "

Lucian laughed at the story, but with a pang. This was the woman who would bid his newly-

found cousin defy his kind intentions. Again there swept over him the wave of defiance.

"She will say that is the 'devil's thought,' " he murmured. "Well, I will not let the thing alone. My course can be as stubborn as her own.

"I will ask to meet Mrs. DeWitt in her presence," he said aloud, "and after that I will go forward alone."

"You do not mean to go away from here, then?"

"Never — until this question is settled. I shall find a lodging and arrange myself for a stay. Rome was not built in a day. I can stay."

The moon rose while they were still an hour's ride from their destination. The Colonel hesitated at a crossroads.

"Since the moon is so well up we can cut right through here. This brings us up back of the DeWitt house, and if any one is up, I can leave the box."

They came out, at length, into a long lane which, passing through dense woods, turned suddenly into a way between thick orchards and wide fields.

"This is Glen Farm," said the Colonel; "yonder is the DeWitt house."

A white cottage sat upon a knoll. In the moonlight its gallery, overhanging a creek bed, was plainly visible. They were driving rapidly to-

wards it when the mares sniffed uneasily and shied once or twice. Lucian's saddle-horse shared the same reluctance to push forward, and balked.

"Funny that their dogs do not give cry," said the Colonel uneasily; "they've got enough of them about."

Lucian pointed suddenly with his whip at half a dozen huddled hounds, skulking in the grass at the side of the road and fence.

"They're afraid," he said, "and so are the horses. Something is wrong, Colonel Buckman."

"Afraid of what, in the name of God?" cried the Colonel angrily; then he stopped. A long and terrible shriek came from somewhere. The mares shied and balked again.

"Is this the place of hell?" cried the Colonel. "Beardsley, my heart actually fails me. What is all this?"

"Animals feel more than men," replied Lucian hoarsely; "there is something wrong. I am going to find out what it is."

The Colonel's teeth chattered ominously.

"I'll go with you, of course. I wanted to reach this negro cabin. Some one will be there, I think."

The hut was dark and empty. There had been no fire all day.

"The negroes are away," said the Colonel,

returning from his search, "there's probably no one up at the house but Dulcie and DeWitt."

"No servants?"

"The servants live in those cabins. The farm-hands are down on the creek further. The negroes are horribly afraid of DeWitt, I can tell you."

"Sensible negroes."

Again and from the house came that long, low cry.

"Fasten your horses," said Lucian between his set teeth, "I am going right up there. Have you a pistol, Colonel?"

"Two of them." He produced a holster from under the seat. The man's coolness was returning.

"So have I. Mine is an admirable weapon. Now, Colonel, we will separate. I don't want you to run any risks. I want to see what that man is about. Don't you shoot him unless you are attacked, Colonel. I will attend to that."

The Colonel was making fast the horses, but he growled out, stumbling after him:

"Do you think I am an infernal coward, you Virginian!"

Lucian had vaulted over the low hedge.

"I don't — only there is Mrs. Buckman to consider. I'm off."

He ran lightly to a small grove of young

trees and was lost to sight. The Colonel knew the place better, and making a circuit, went stealthily toward the house under cover of a grape-vine trellis. He had almost reached it, when he heard stealthy footsteps and a man's voice singing or humming. He crouched low down and looked out between the leaves. A sight met his eyes that fairly froze his soul with terror. Into the open space of the lawn passed Dr. DeWitt. He was bareheaded. On his undershirt and linen trousers were great splotches and drops of something that looked like blood. His shoes had been removed. His right hand held a narrow, thin knife such as surgeons use, and the left waved a new hatchet. These weapons he seemed to delight to raise up in the moonlight, while he hummed or sang. His progress was a strange, rhythmical dance not unlike the war ceremonies of the Indians. Humming always, he went to and fro over the lawn until the Colonel had recovered from his first amazed horror.

"Crazy as a loon," thought the Colonel, "and it looks as though he has killed Dulcie. God help us!"

The long, piteous cry came again, this time so near that the old Kentuckian could locate it. He drew a long breath of relief.

"That is the bitch, Helvetia," he decided,

"I'd know her sorrow-cry in a pack of a thousand. I'll find her, for it may be she's stuck to Dulcie as only a dog does."

He brushed his hands over his eyes. It was a tribute to the memory of several dead dogs of his own youth and manhood. He broke down a bar of the trellis and forced his way through the vines. He could thus reach the house without being seen by the doctor, who was still teetering, mowing, and bowing about in his maudlin orgy on the lawn.

He was quite near the house when a terrible roaring bay, appealing, sonorous and angry, broke from the dog in the house.

"It is Helvetia," he muttered, "and there is danger to Dulcie, or the creature never would snarl like that."

As fast as his feet could carry him, he hurried to the house. The front door was wide open. Directed by the bay of the dog, he passed up the stairs, his pistol in his hand.

At the head, in the hallway, he saw Lucian Beardsley standing still. The younger man at once motioned him to be silent and to advance. The hound stood in the hallway, guarding a door. It would have been death to have gone a step farther.

"I don't like to shoot her," whispered Lucian, "but do look at that, Colonel. We must get in."

The door before which the dog stood had been broken open and hung across the opening on one hinge. Beyond was ominous silence.

"She is in there, dead or alive," whispered the Colonel, "and Helvetia has broken her chain since that thing was done."

The dog ceased her angry baying and was sniffing about the Colonel, whom she recognized.

"I wonder if she does know me," whispered the Colonel. "Beardsley, see if that madman is out on the lawn. You are taller. Yes? We must risk something. Let me call to the dog. I've been Master of Hounds so many times that she must know me. Here Veesh, you good dog, don't you know me? Down, we'll not hurt you."

The creature crawled on her belly toward him.

"Afraid of my whip, are you? Now Beardsley, I'll keep guard, and you look into that room."

"Colonel!"

"You must. I've known her always. I can't—" his voice broke — "I can't, for I must keep my head."

The younger man stepped forward. He forgot caution and spoke aloud.

"She may be alive."

"God grant it."

"Must I? Must I?"

"You must. I'm trying to get up my courage, but that — O, no, I can't!"

Lucian Beardsley thrust his body through the aperture. There were two windows in the room that looked out to the woods. The third, to the south, let in a glorious flood of moonlight that fell across the bed. On it was a figure, still lying as asleep. With one bound Lucian reached it, with one wild oath he covered its marble nudity away from his own eyes with the drapery of the disordered couch. Then, and only then, he felt the pulse, he laid his ear to the heart, he listened to the breathing. Shaking as with an ague, he picked up a handkerchief that lay on the floor, and then a bottle that his foot kicked. He staggered back to the door and said hoarsely, brokenly:

"She is not dead, Colonel. She is stupid from chloroform, maybe from morphine also. Come in here and see this poor victim, sir."

The Colonel stumbled into the room. He raised the limp hand.

"O, Dulcie, Dulcie!" he cried. "This to be! Philip's poor little maid! O, my God!"

Lucian caught his arm. A sound was plainly heard on the stairs.

"He is coming up," said the Colonel.

Lucian opened a closet.

"Let us stand here."

They entered the closet just in time. Soft footsteps came on unsteadily. The hound gave its low cry, then dashed into the room, crouching under the bed. A maniacal laugh was heard, then the dark body of the man appeared at the opening. He came through. To the horror of both men he came through on all fours. In this awful fashion he ran about the room with strange, wagging motions of the head. It was a most sickening sight and one never to be forgotten.

As yet the drug-mad creature had taken no notice of the still figure on the bed. Suddenly he stood erect and went toward her. The same impulse struck the old and the young man at the same time. Mowing terribly, the ugly blood splotches showing plainly, this horrible human being moved towards Dulcie. He stretched forth his hand to touch the still form. There were two flashes, two reports, and then a scream. The doctor's arm fell, he went over backward. Colonel Buckman strode to Dulcie. He gathered the bed clothes about her.

"Let that devil lie," he said grimly; "you come on. I'll send some niggers to him and for a doctor. One or both of us winged him — I wouldn't care if I'd killed him, not I! I'm going to take the poor girl home, Mrs. Buckman or no Mrs. Buckman! Is there any way of reviving

her, Beardsley? I am afraid she will die. Help me carry her down stairs."

They sat down on the porch, with the moonlight shining full upon them. Lucian went into the house and found water. With it they bathed Dulcie's face and hands, and Lucian fanned her. Presently she moved, but first because of poor Helvetia's licking her hand affectionately. From the upper floor came loud cries and groans and curses. Every moment they expected Dr. DeWitt to come stumbling down.

"We will take her away as she is," cried the Colonel, "she will come around if she is drugged. He may have firearms and make a dash at us any moment."

"Get the horse then," he added after trying to lift her; "the life is out of me."

When the Eastern man dashed away, Dulcie lifted her head and laid her arms on the Colonel's neck, with a terrible sob. He wrapped the bed-clothing about her, with a fierce anger in him.

Lucian led up the black horse, and springing upon him, took the woman from the staggering Colonel. Then he hurried down the knoll toward the buggy, conscious of curses and shouts from an upper window. His blood ran riot, hot as never before, and he vowed fealty to this kinswoman in his arms with every mad leap of his pulses. For the first time in his life woman —

to be shielded from woe and from abuse — came into this man's life. It was as if before she had been only the thing his savage strain had held her, but that, at this moment, civilization and its better things, for woman, asserted itself and cried, "Protect — love — shield — die for!" Such care, such devotion, such rescue as Lucian Beardsley could give a woman he would give Dulcie DeWitt. So he vowed, and vowing, watched with concern the Colonel come steadily down the orchard.

"I'm clear undone, Beardsley," he said in the moonlight, "he has been vivisecting Veesh's puppies on a table. No wonder the poor beast went half mad."

"Ride my horse, Colonel," said Lucian; "stick on somehow, and I will drive the mares and try to care for Mrs. DeWitt."

Slowly they went, Helvetia following. It seemed miles to the Buckman place, miles up the avenue and to the porch, where they found Mrs. Buckman and a negro waiting anxiously.

"We heard shots," she said, "and I know something is wrong. Robert, Robert, what is it?"

The Colonel slipped from the black horse and sat upon the steps.

"I've brought Dulcie DeWitt home with us.

I shot him, Sudie, and may God forgive me for having been such a coward as to send her back to him !”

“I shot him also,” added Lucian Beardsley, “and here is his victim. Let me carry her in and go elsewhere.”

He knew only the way to his own room, and there left his burden on the bed. His great eyes fairly blazed on Mrs. Buckman, who was still standing by the Colonel.

“I’m going for a doctor to go out to that place. Good-night, Mrs. Buckman, and do be good to her. No woman ever suffered more.”

He saw the wife lead the overwrought man up the porch steps as he turned his horse into the avenue and galloped away at a mad pace.

CHAPTER FIVE

A DEED WITHOUT A NAME

IN the days that came after, Lucian Beardsley could never remember with any exactness the actual course of events. He was caught on the whirlwind of Fate, tossed hither and thither without conscious volition. There was a wild, swift ride in the moonlight, a scurry beside a glittering river, the click and clack of sharp hoofs on a stony roadway, and then an impetuous entrance into the sleeping town of Grafton. They told him afterwards that he had tried to batter down the doors of the rambling country hotel.

At last a sleepy voice hailed him from above and enquired mildly as to what was wanted. Then the Virginian demanded hearers to a story of how he had shot Dr. DeWitt an hour before and wanted help sent out to him.

This was a tale exciting enough to bring down not one but several men in undershirts

and trousers. One or two of them brought along revolvers and shot-guns. The landlord was a cool and lank individual, who at once opened up the bar to meet emergency calls. His voice was always soothing and persuasive.

"Sence you're ready dressed, Mr. Beardsley, p'raps you wouldn't mind rousin' the doctah, sah. Third house up the road. He is used to it, so jes' raise your voice up a trifle. We'll hitch right up, an' a couple of us will lick out there with Doc. Sure you hain't killed him, damn him? Then you come right back heah, sah, an' we'll put you up 'til mornin'. We'll get Beam' Van Wye fer you ef ye're arrested — you expect that, shorely, sah — an' he'll see to all the preliminaries. The law has to take its coas', sah. You'll understand we all yer friends an' would do it ourselves if necessary. You'll be cleared, sah, of coas', sah."

"Arrest me?" cried the Virginian, aghast at the idea.

"Suttinly, sah, but it won't 'mount to a thing. Call the doctah, Mr. Beardsley, while I rouses up the niggahs."

Lucian rushed his sweating horse a little farther on. The doctor, burly and jovial, appeared in his night-clothes upon a convenient upper gallery. While listening to an incoherent tale he reached backward, and with no embar-

rassment, continued to don his garments of the daytime. As he strained his suspenders and buttoned and tied he flung out remarks to the horseman below.

"I don't care if you've settled him forever. He's gone so far he's only fit for an insane asylum, and that's about the honest fact. Nothing can be done for him now and she will have to leave him some day. Yes, I'm hurrying. He probably isn't so bad off if he could cuss as lively as you said he did."

He turned ere he disappeared in through a door.

"You don't have any idea I had better send for the Coroner, do you?"

A faintness came over the spirit of the Virginian. The question was too blunt. He shook his head and rode back to the hotel. It was filling up with neighbouring men and a few women. All were discussing the story.

"Let me have a room, will you?" he said a little haughtily; "let me get out of this."

A sarcastic female flung a remark after him:

"Makes mighty free with his remarks as well as his weepens, don't he?"

"I'd hesh if I war you," growled her husband; "as if you owned all Grafton."

The lank landlord led Lucian up a dark stairway and into a corner room with five windows.

"I'd go to sleep if I war you," he advised, "and I'll send out to the Colonel's after yer things for you. I calkilate there'll be a warrant out for you 'bout four o'clock, jes' as soon as we've heerd from the doctor. But keep a stiff upper lip. Beam' Van Wye, he will see to everything, and all you got to do is to foot the bill."

Lucian fell on the bed physically exhausted.

"Send a telegram for my man, Blount Summers, at the Phoenix, Lexington. Tell him to come down here with the baggage. Have you any one to wait on me? I'm about worn out."

The landlord mused.

"There mought be John Childress."

"Who?"

"O, an old negro around hyah. Come to think of it, he war Mis' DeWitt's fathah's own nigger. I calkilate I seen him hangin' around downstairs a spell ago."

"Send him up if he is there," said Lucian, lying on his back and gazing at the ceiling.

Presently a tall old negro entered, with a can of hot water and a low bow. Lucian lay quite still. Gentle fingers unfastened his collar and tie, relieved him of his shoes, and bathed his dusty face and hands. Later a generous drink put life into him. He sat up then. The negro regarded him with much interest.

"What is your name, boy?"

"John, sah, John Childress."

"That is a good name."

"Yes, sah, I war raised 'long o' Miss Dulcie's paw. Air she any hu't, sah? I do t'anks you fer shootin' dat deliberlt debbil, sah."

"O, you do! Well, John, stay here and wait on me. Once, long ago, our family and one of the old Childress people married. Mrs. DeWitt is a cousin, you see. That is why I could not stand it. See?"

"I see whar ye're jes' right, sah."

"John, I'm going to sleep. If the law comes to the door, keep it out until I get rested. Mind what I tell you, John!"

The man grinned and rolled his sad eyes.

"I wull, sah, I wull. I tells Massa Van Wye jes' ter keep de lor in de hall fer a spell."

Lucian's superb health conquered his nerves. He fell into a dreamless slumber after reflecting, very much as all moneyed men are apt to reflect, that wealth is a key that opens all doors. While the Virginian lay there, quietly sleeping, the law came and waited respectfully for him to awaken. Outside his door sat a town marshal, with a warrant sworn out by Dr. DeWitt's cousin, Henry Swayne, and the village lawyer, Beamer Van Wye.

Morning came and brought the news that Dr. DeWitt was shot twice, both in the arm and

side, but that one shot made only a flesh wound. The town seethed with the idea that Colonel Buckman, also, was a guilty party, although the man asleep above stairs had not once mentioned the fact. Dr. DeWitt had mouthed curses and threats enough to tell the truth, although still raving like a lunatic. Henry Swayne swore out another warrant, and two constables went to Broad Acres. At last the increasing noise outside the hotel wakened Lucian. He opened his eyes to see John sitting at the door, which pushed inward, and was fastened by a great wooden button as well as an iron bolt.

"Dey air out dar, sah."

"They?"

"Constubbles an' ma'shul, sah. Massa Van Wye done got you bailed out a'reddy."

Lucian laughed, but a little bitterly. He wondered what his brother Fordyce would say if he knew. Then he thought of Dulcie DeWitt and groaned. Life had lost its zest.

The man that John now let in at the cautiously opened door was tall and handsome, middle-aged, but curiously blighted in appearance. It was not dissipation, but as if a sharp axe had been at the roots of an oak tree that dies slowly and surely. His face was even noble, and his long hair was pushed back from a brow white and broad to a fault.

The two men gazed at each other for a moment. Lucian held out his hand and said:

"I am glad to meet you sir."

The lawyer replied in kind, but regarded the Virginian with a curious yet courteous scrutiny. He asked a few questions, then remarked:

"You will have no trouble, Mr. Beardsley, as Doctor DeWitt is only winged a little and the wound in the side a flesh scratch. I am sure neither of you shot to kill, and it is a good thing, a good thing. Mrs. DeWitt will get the worst of it because of the publicity."

Lucian Beardsley flushed in spite of his efforts.

"That is a hard assertion for me to listen to. She is a distant kinswoman of mine, and I mean to stand by her."

"Colonel Buckman is coming," the lawyer observed dryly; "they got him quick enough."

The horse breeder looked a decade older in the morning light. Deep lines furrowed his red face. He shook hands with the lawyer and then came over and sat by Lucian's bed.

"I hope you slept, Beardsley. I never closed my eyes. I cannot get the horror of it out of my mind. They say he is all right, but Dulcie is in a bad way. I've sent the doctor right out. That wretch gave her morphine or chloroform all day because she was going to run away.

He let all the negroes off on a holiday excursion."

"And your wife?"

"Is nursing Dulcie as her mother would have done, but is broken-hearted, broken-hearted over the scandal there will be."

"Scandal?"

"Every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the county will be rolling it all over their tongues. Folks are bound to talk, but we must not tell — not we — what we really saw there."

"But, Colonel —"

"You must spare the woman, Beardsley. O, you will, you will! He could easily attack us, you see, for some remark we carelessly passed, or about your refusal to take the horse. That would do very well. Lord, Beardsley, you could not get up and tell about all that, not you! Come here, Van Wye, and convince this youngster. We all must save Dulcie, Beamer; we must!"—

"Show up the villain!" cried Lucian with heat.

"The law don't ask for such a sacrifice of her," expostulated the Colonel, "and to think of it all being in the papers, going everywhere! Why, her father would come out of his grave, wouldn't he, Beamer? We shot, both of us. That's all. Fine whatever old Billy Bosworth wants.

Fine paid, drinks all round, everything pleasant, and that's the end — that's all!"

The Colonel slapped his thigh with unction at his own contrivances.

"I think the man should be exposed, not shielded," declared the Virginian. "Men should stand by their deeds."

The quiet one glanced over the Colonel's head out of the window.

"I have held back nothing," went on Lucian, "but it was truth. I will not deny it."

"You ought to have thought deeper," retorted the Colonel, "but, of course, you are not one of us. You can't understand us. No one outside can."

Pride burned on Lucian's brow.

"Colonel, a hundred years ago my great-grandmother and great-grandfather were married here. She was a Kentuckian. My grandfather was born here. I feel that I have some claim on the kindness of the people here, some sympathy with them, while I am proud to be a Virginian. But over all that, I am a man and not a child. I think my cousin — for cousin she is to me — has been cruelly treated by you all; is not protected or shielded from criminal cruelty. Why not expose this madman's crimes? Why not rescue the well-born woman from a degradation that is actually foul? They say no

asylum would have him after his drug sprees are over. She, and she alone, because married to him, must endure all. I will not hide or palliate such a course, not I!"

"So you want to tell it all, you?" angrily cried the Colonel.

"I do not want to tell anything," retorted Lucian. "Were it not for the woman, I would leave you all in contempt. I will be silent now, but I feel assured that this exposure will have to come sooner or later; I shall choose my own way to work."

"Take my advice," roared the Colonel. "Go back home and let us alone and let Dulcie alone. You are not of us, and you must not interfere. You've been world-raised, educated, polished, slicked over, all your decent old notions plastered with ones brought over from France and England and God knows where, only that it is where people are so old they're rotten. You haven't any idea of the way we regard marriage. You have never thought once of it as sacred. Women to you are playthings, and when the paint wears off you throw them away like toys."

The plain truth of these remarks absolutely calmed Lucian's anger. He smiled rather amused.

"Some of those things are very true, Colonel.

Some others are new to me. I hope I am sound at the core, but I do not suppose I feel as you do. Well, I will keep silent in spite of my convictions. I'll do more. I've sprained my ankle somehow, and will not appear at all."

This view of the case was so eminently satisfactory to the Colonel that he became as meek as a lamb.

"Set the case for nine o'clock," he said to the lawyer; "'pears to me you are a mighty help, ain't you? Haven't said a damn word all this time. Well, you know what to do now. I'll appear, he will not, and I'm going to eat my breakfast and feel better afterwards. Have yours sent up, Beardsl y? I brought over your dressing-case and valises for you."

"I feel like going asleep again," said the Virginian. "Now suppose you hold your little Kentucky hocus-pocus any way you like. I'll pay all the fines if I can only sleep and not feel so furious when I wake up. It don't pay. Go ahead, Colonel, and Mr. Van Wye, and suppose you order all that this house affords on me. You will please treat Mr. Van Wye to the best, Colonel, and let me alone."

"A right testy and chesty gentleman," quoth the lawyer below stairs at the bar, "even for these parts."

"A man, by the eternal!" quoth the Colonel

in reply, "a man such as we had in the old days when courage counted for something. A spirit uncompromising and yet admirable. He would certainly fall in love with Dulcie if he was with her, the foolish poppet she is. I'll fight him tooth and nail about it, Beamer, but I don't know how it will turn out. He's new to us, new to us, and we can't measure the new ways and fashions out here. He would think she was just as good divorced as if she was fresh and new for him. I've heard that where he come from they like experience better than freshness. Young men marry older women, and men and women change partners like at a dance. It is all too much for me, and I'm too old-fashioned to understand. Dulcie is well-rooted in life. How will she meet these new ideas? It's a fifteen puzzle, that's what it is, Beamer. She has always blown east and west with the wind. We must take care of her, and keep her away from this divorce business."

The lawyer regarded the Colonel with large, deep-set eyes. Then he spoke out languidly:

"He is as daring as Satan, and has plenty of money."

"A millionaire by rumour," confirmed the Colonel; "one of the confounded Four Hundred of New York, although of a good old Virginia stock. Knows London and Paris and Vienna

as well as I know my own stable-yard, and goes to St. Petersburg or Australia as easily as I go to Lexington or Cincinnati. When you know it all there isn't much to be afraid of, but I wish he was in Guinea, instead of here, with his new whims."

"But you like him."

"Can't help it, if he *is* a sort of forbidden thing, according to my ideas. I suppose I would admire the devil's manners and shrewdness. They must be pretty slick, Beamer. I'm thinking all the time of our poor, sweet little woman out there. Why, if he wanted to do it, he'd marry her in twenty-four hours after divorcing her and never feel a qualm of conscience, or he would not marry her at all. Who knows?"

The spare, pale man was quite earnest as he leaned over the small round breakfast-table.

"I rather believe in him, Colonel. I believe he is sincere in his desire to help a kinswoman."

"Sho!" said the Colonel, "she is mighty tempting with those big, pitiful eyes of hers. She used to twist me 'round her finger when she was ten. Sincerity? The devil, Van Wye!"

"Even he is sometimes not as black as he is painted," suggested the lawyer.

The Colonel again relented over his breakfast.

"I like his spirit. I wish I was young again and I would see something of the world myself. I

don't know much but horses and stables, after all."

If ever Grafton suffered a greivous disappointment it was over the DeWitt shooting affair. All the town was there and many of the county. The New York "guy" did not appear and the Colonel was obviously and determinedly good-natured. The doctor's word excused Mr. Beardsley, whose testimony was read. The Colonel testified to shooting at Doctor DeWitt after high words. Mr. Beardsley admitted the same. Both said it was necessary and in self-defence. The doctor was not himself and there one had it. Lawyer Van Wye explained all this with great gravity, while every soul in the room knew the actual truth or near it. They admired the ingenuity, recognized the device, and understood the reason. Dr. Snow testified that Dr. DeWitt's wounds were not of a serious character. As it was only a little gentlemanly shooting, fines were assessed at fifty dollars each for carrying concealed and deadly weapons, and the crowd adjourned to the hotel bar, where the Colonel at once ordered drinks all around and the landlord, his wife and the stablemen were kept busy for an hour dispensing liquid hospitality. The Colonel and the lawyer found Lucian eating a hearty breakfast, with the tray on the bed, and he was quite ready to acknowledge a great feeling of relief over the outcome.

"Henry Swayne wanted Bosworth to continue," said the Colonel, "but Bosworth knows there hain't any money about Henry's business or the doctor's, either."

"Law is law," quoth Van Wye smiling, "at least in Grafton. Well, it is all over now, unless Doctor DeWitt does a little gentlemanly shooting on his own account when he goes on his next tear."

"I will risk that," said Lucian, "as an opium fiend is the worst of cowards and the worst of bullies to boot. Now to another matter. Mr. Van Wye, I have been asking John about a house here that is empty and on the edge of Grafton. Is it not called 'Paradise'? John tells me it is partly furnished and that it has long been empty. I feel that it would suit me much better than a hotel while I stay here."

"Do you mean that you would open it, furnish it, and live there?"

"For a time," said Lucian, "I feel that I am needed here. It is carrying war right into the enemy's camp, Colonel, but as you think you are doing right, so do I. I do not claim a conscience, but my ideas and my inclinations tell me to stay."

"Don't come out to Broad Acres for a while," grinned the Colonel; "I think I see Mrs. Buckman when she hears that you're located. Don't

you press yourself on us until we are reconciled. Now we are unstrung and irritable. Mrs. DeWitt is ill, very ill this time. The doctor has been out and says she will not be herself for weeks. So you will have to let her alone and maybe you will soon get tired of it all. Grafton is not a lively place."

"I think it is," said Lucian graciously; "it has been exceedingly lively for several days. In fact, short of a war, it gives one the most uncertain of feelings. I wonder if I could drive down to see this Paradise of yours to-morrow, Van Wye? I like the name. I believe I shall like the place."

"I'm off," cried the Colonel. "You do beat the world. I don't know what I will hear next. I shall fight you tooth and nail about Dulcie."

"What are you afraid of?" retorted the Virginian. "I suppose it will dawn on me some day if you don't tell me. Things permeate a man here. Now, Mr. Van Wye, tell me about this old Paradise — I hear it has a most charming and old-fashioned garden."

CHAPTER SIX

IN THE VEIN OF CHIVALRY

ALL day the Virginian dozed and at last slept soundly. When he awoke the next morning he was once more normal and placid. It was a warm morning and already the flies buzzed busily against the blue mosquito netting which screened the long windows. The man idly watched them and did not trouble himself to think. Suddenly the events of yesterday recurred to him with deep significance. Was he asleep and did he dream, or had he awakened from a long sleep and lived for the first time?

All the while the old servant, John Childress, fanned him tirelessly or moved about to add to his comfort. Lucian followed his gaunt form with an idle gaze. He scanned his features curiously, he noted with some shade of melancholy the high cheek bones, the sidewise glances not unlike his own, and always characteristic of that Indian ancestor as pictured by him.

"John," he said after a short consideration, "John, I suppose you are called Childress after your former master's family. That was the custom, wasn't it? Was your master Philip Childress's father?"

"Yes, massa," replied the old man gently, "I war brung right up erlong with Massa Philip. He war jes' a little older'n me."

"He should have given you a little house and some ground," said Lucian musingly.

"De wah took most all dat," replied the man, "and he wanted Miss Dulcie to be fixed jes right. Couldn't give every nigga he had owned a home. Dar war moah than me, sah, wen de wah come."

"Well, I'll take you with me, John," spoke the Virginian warmly. "I'll keep you with me."

"You air moughty kind," observed the old man, "but, sah, dar's two things I can't leab — my old woman and Kentucky, sah. Dem air two things I can't leab."

Lucian looked at him a moment. A week ago he would have thought him foolish, shiftless. This moment he was not able to form an opinion. He thought the old man had a firm hold on a cord that was tightening around his own heart. Fortune had always been friends with him, but she might frown, and, then, had he a saving rope out anywhere?

He resolutely kept his thoughts from the events of the previous night. He did not dare to think, for even a passing thought shook his whole being. It was a dream, a nightmare. He felt that he might go mad himself at the very memory.

"John, John!" he cried, "I cannot stay in doors any longer. We will go to see that house if you will borrow me a cane. I must be out of doors and drive the blue devils away. Your Kentucky is too serious a matter."

While he was limping along the street, the cynosure of many curious eyes, his English servant came up from the railroad station. He had just arrived, also an array of trunks, bags, parcels, and hampers that amazed the Grafton loafers.

This man was a quiet Englishman who had served Lucian since the time of his brother's marriage. He liked his American master and was faithful beyond his hire. If he was disgusted at the summons to this small village it did not show in his countenance, but his eyebrows lifted as Lucian limped up with the old negro following respectfully in the rear.

"Leave the trunks for the present," ordered Lucian, "You are going with me to look at a house."

Mr. Summers, very correct in dress and man-

ner, gave no hint of his feelings save in his eyebrows.

"I'm going to promote you," went on his master. "You will have to help me a great deal while here, and I've taken on this man for a temporary body-servant. Dress him up right. Linen is the proper thing, isn't it?"

Mr. Summers looked at the new servant and thought that linen would be the proper thing.

The keys of the empty house were with Beamer Van Wye. That worthy was reading Shakspeare while swinging in an old hammock back of his frame office. He sprang up and put on a seersucker coat when he saw the procession filing in at the gate.

"You really want that house?" he asked, quite gaily for him.

"Really. My family grows, for I have adopted John, and he will not leave his wife, he says. Summers is indispensable, and I have two horses besides my brother's new black one."

"Grafton has never before had a real fairy prince," observed the lawyer dryly. "The young maidens have been looking for the man in the moon. Now he has come."

His faded but expressive eyes met Lucian's with a smiling and meaning look. The nonsense and the arrival of his servant, a familiar figure from the more placid existence of the past, up-

lifted Lucian. He had but to order and there was help at hand.

"Where is this Paradise?" he laughed as the lawyer took down a bunch of keys and put on a sun-bleached hat.

"On the outer edge of the village. It is still a fine place. In other days it was the abode of hospitality. The need of money is the reason of its neglect. The owner is in Italy. His daughter had a voice and was endeavouring to cultivate it when she married there."

There was such a peculiar note of sadness in his tone that Lucian forebore to question him.

They passed along the quiet Grafton streets where wooden houses were set back in green yards, sometimes deep in the embowering orchards. Now and again houses of red brick or white frame, with porches and many outbuildings, appeared. At last there appeared a long, low wall of grey masonry, over which the branches of fruit trees hung low.

"Behind this wall lies Paradise," said the lawyer; "its garden still deserves the name."

He unfastened a padlocked gate of white palings between two stone posts. Above the rose-vines formed an arch and, untrimmed for years, swung blossoming branches over their very heads. A grass-grown avenue led forward to a circular plat. In the midst of wild-growing weed and

bush stood an ancient sun-dial. The circular avenue passed before the lower steps of a red house, one story in the front, while further back the windows of the second story showing plainly over the flat roof. A terrace of masonry was built along the broad front of the house, a flight of steps led up to a double door set in a recessed alcove of elaborately carved woodwork. Vines broken and untrained were riotous everywhere. Trailing rose-branches and honeysuckle tendrils covered the front steps, while purple clematis and wistaria shook at them from the corners of the house and windows.

Lucian drew a deep breath.

"Paradise!" he breathed hungrily. "I can make this place so lovely that every one will stand outside disconsolate. It will be almost an Italian place, with awnings here and there, and this garden rearranged. Let us go inside, Mr. Van Wye."

There was a wide hall through the house, a quaint, narrow, curving staircase at the back, four large rooms in the main building and half a dozen smaller ones in the rear. The furniture was old, very quaint and very dusty, and many of the bare windows were broken.

"As it is, it is much better than the hotel," said Lucian, "and I will sleep here to-night even if I do see ghosts. The deed is done, good Mr.

Van Wye. You are privileged to smoke every night on this terrace and to keep me company."

"How long will you want it?" asked the lawyer curiously.

"How long, how long?" repeated Lucian, startled. A problem stared him in the face. "Six months, no, no, say a year. You see, I have my cousin to look after. And now, my good friend, sit you down and see what fine executive ability Summers and myself have. John, you also have your part to play. Where is your wife?"

"Home, sir, in de old cabin."

"Can she keep this house with some of those yellow girls for help?"

"She's a good woman," put in the lawyer, "and not so old as you would think, to look at John."

"Get her here, John. Let her fix me that room at once, and make the stable ready. Summers, write out orders for our instant needs, and telegraph them to Lexington and Cincinnati."

He drew the lawyer's arm through his own and they walked down the deserted garden paths.

"Do you know," Lucian remarked, watching the scared flight of a number of cardinals who, because of the long, deserted privacy of this odorous garden had long nested there without fear, "I have dwelt in lodgings, apartments, flats, hotels, what not? Fordyce and I once rented a

whole palace for a summer — but this — this is the first time in my life that I have ever had a real home."

"It means a great deal," acquiesced the pale man, "to house, to shelter, to withdraw into, to enclose one's self as in a circle of promising privacy. It is a castle, a kingship, a reply to Nature's best question. A home answers the deepest and purest demand a man makes of himself."

Lucian's eyes shone under his fine brows.

"What a poem you make of it! I could not buy that feeling with money."

"The critic cannot write a song or verse," the lawyer replied quietly, "and I have no home save a room in a widow's boarding-house."

"Be my guest while I stay here," impulsively cried the Virginian.

"No, no. I would rather come and go, free as air. It will be a place to look to, to linger in, and where I can smoke my pipe when the oil gives out of my lamp."

He laughed half-sadly.

"You shall be my lawyer at least," said the younger man. "I always have lawyers about. But you will have to help me with my cousin if she will allow it. Do you know" — here he smiled very clearly up into the eyes of the man before him — "I was imagining her a moment ago, walking down this path with a happy look in her

eyes and a smile. I have never seen her smile. I only imagine it. She would look up at the birds and her thoughts, her actions, her life, should be as free as they are."

His face was lit with enthusiasm. Beamer Van Wye was startled. He gave him a sharp look of scrutiny and walked onward.

"You are either angel or devil," said he as he turned into the avenue. "I wonder which one?"

"Your ideas and Mrs. Buckman's are singularly alike," laughed Lucian. "The question was never presented to me before I came to Kentucky. Here people will have your spiritual pedigree. I really do not know, Van Wye," he continued a little mockingly, "but whatever is pressing me onward drives me on as a wind drives a ship on to the rocks."

That night the new occupant, Summers, and John Childress slept in the red house, the first inhabitants for years. By the next night it was more habitable, and, within a week the whole county was talking of the millionaire from New York who had leased the old Le Duc house, of his horses and fine carriages, his many servants and the extent of the changes he made. The fact that he was kin to Dulcie DeWitt and had shot the doctor for trying to abuse her was fine food for gossiping tongues.

Busy as he was, Lucian did not forget to send a

daily note to the Colonel, accompanied by some fruit or flowers for Mrs. Buckman. He asked for news of his cousin and repeated his desire to see her when she was better. He also invited the Colonel to come to see him in his new quarters, adding that he hoped the day would soon come when he could ask Mrs. Buckman. To these polite essays he received formal little notes of thanks, with the meagre information that, as yet, Mrs. DeWitt could see no one. This went on for a fortnight and Lucian grew restless. He felt quite relieved, one afternoon, to see Colonel Buckman and Beamer Van Wye strolling up the avenue of Paradise, and he went forward to welcome them with a glow of good feeling that he had never experienced when host to more important men whom he had dined and wined in other days.

The fat Colonel looked about him at the flower-set terrace, the awnings and the screens of Indian matting, the couches, divans and fans, and then stared at the Virginian until he laughed aloud.

"We're slow folks here," he said, "but you've brought India into Kentucky. Well, you've done wonders. We've got to treat you right when you are spending so much money with us, eh, Beamer?"

The lawyer laughed also, that half-sad note, and followed Lucian with his eyes as he stretched

himself out on his divan. John went busily to and fro with ices, glasses of cooling drinks, and fans. Lucian was at his best, very gay, very handsome, yet always with that singular alertness and readiness that was more attractive than his beauty. He might have been an East Indian of high caste among his present surroundings, and his warm pallor and white clothing aided the illusion.

"The Indian boy his ancestor adopted was probably a Shewanee," mused the lawyer, "and the Shewanee, of all the Indian tribes, alone cherished the idea that he had originally crossed a great water. Who knows from whence came this man? There are in him strange blendings of prince and savage. He says, 'Fortune and I are friends' with a laugh. Fate, the angels, Satan, God — who does favour him, for he is favoured among mortals?"

"How is my cousin and Mrs. Buckman?" recited the Colonel, "and I bring you my wife's message that you can call on Mrs. DeWitt tomorrow afternoon for an hour."

"How is DeWitt?"

The lawyer replied:

"He is getting on very well. He hasn't any particular use for you."

"Very likely. What about the Colonel?"

"O, the Colonel is an old neighbour. Besides,

he knows right where the Colonel stands in respect to his past conduct."

"Does he want to know where I stand?" asked Lucian, coolly. "I can send out my opinion to him by a messenger if he has any doubt about it. We do not screen actual brutalities down East. We publish villainies and expose criminals."

"Now you are a resident, you must be more loyal to your own neighbourhood," said the Colonel. "Good Lord! What's the use of putting all one's family affairs into the newspapers? It don't do any good. You're too rash, my dear fellow, and I'm afraid you are going to hear your cousin, far removed, tell you so some day."

A chill ran down Lucian's back. He lifted his cigar and said, with the utmost coolness:

"That may be. But remember, I have not seen or talked to my cousin. She thinks she is encompassed in hopeless misery even as the Cubans were shut in by those terrible tangles of barbed wire. She may see with my eyes later on, and free herself."

Beautiful eyes his were, with a look of determination. The Colonel sighed and gave himself up to the delights of the hour as expressed by an unlimited amount of mint julep, good cigars, and a story-teller like Beamer Van Wye to amuse one's leisure.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHO EVER LOVED THAT LOVED NOT AT FIRST SIGHT?

The next afternoon Dulcinea DeWitt was resting peacefully on a low couch in the wire-screened north porch at Broad Acres. She was still so white and weak that Dr. Snow talked gravely of Northern air and the benefits of a change. Her white gown, one of Mrs. Buckman's, was hardly whiter than her pinched face, in which her large eyes seemed pathetically round and childish. As yet the woman had not roused from her apathetic surrender to despair. She never would know all that had happened. She knew that, in the first awful hours of her terror that day, she had tried to escape but was unsuccessful. Beyond that was black horror, and she only knew that she was now at Broad Acres and that the first time the Colonel had been in to see her he had actually cried over her declaring he would never send her home

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until she wanted to go. In time, she vaguely thought, she would have to go back, but now she would rest — and wake at night to pray that something, anything, death itself would give her future rest and peace. Sometimes a formless resolve agitated her. She thought of death, and the thought, once cherished, became strangely sweet to her, although it was in the vaguest way and as a means of escape.

At times, fleeting impressions held her. She remembered moonlight, the dog's howls and cries, the ride, the Colonel's protecting arms and another sense of protection — but all these impressions were like dreams, so mysteriously, vaguely indistinct. She asked no questions, because to know anything surely was certain misery and degradation. The Colonel did not see her often. It always seemed to affect him to a strange degree. She grew surer and surer that something terrible had happened on that May night.

"Comp'ny comin', Mis' Dulcie," said Mrs. Buckman's Milly, armed with comb and brush, "I got tuh fix yuh ha'r nice."

"Who is it?" inquired Dulcie, languidly. "It is not Dr. Snow's day."

"Dunno. Mis' Sudie done tole me tuh fix yuh up neat an' purty for comp'ny."

As Milly fastened up the abundant braids of hair Mrs. Buckman came in.

"The Colonel is going to bring a visitor, Dulcie," she said very gently, "a gentleman who is a sort of cousin of yours — quite distant. They have got those papers for you that your father always wanted to get from Nancy Manifold."

"Really!" exclaimed Dulcie with a show of interest. "I thought Peter Manifold said he never would give them up."

"I believe his second wife coaxed him to do it," replied Mrs. Buckman straightening the pillow. "She seems well disposed now, though she was such a wild girl. She's got a little baby and she seems to be making Peter a good wife."

"Nance had a right bad disposition," observed Dulcie languidly; "no one could get on with her at all. Who is this new cousin, Aunt Sudie?"

"He comes from the East and is out here buying horses, I believe. His name is Beardsley."

Suddenly a flush coloured all Dulcie's face.

"He never is that stranger who was going to buy my Cupid, is he?"

Mrs. Buckman bowed her head gravely and said:

"I didn't know you knew his name. Where did you hear it?"

"O, every one knew that, I believe, the very next day. It really isn't he, is it, Aunt Sudie?"

"Yes, that's the man. He didn't know then

that you were any kin to him. He found it out by accident from something the Colonel said. His great-grandmother was a Willa Childress. He went after those papers Peter Manifold had, but Kitty May was bound to send them over to you, Dulcie."

Dulcie looked thoughtful.

"I don't want to see any one at all, Aunt Suddie, unless I must. So he's kin or he claims kin?"

"He claims kin," said Mrs. Buckman, "but it is certainly a great ways off, and don't you be carried away any with him. He is very different from we all, and his ideas are different. You know," rather sadly, "I'm real old-fashioned myself, and I have strong notions of right and wrong, but I guess they are the best ones to have, Dulcie — best, after all, dear."

Dulcie was trembling almost to tears.

"I don't feel equal to seeing strangers just yet," she began piteously, but the door opened and the Colonel, very red in the face, ushered in Mr. Lucian Beardsley.

Dulcie half-raised on her couch, looked across at the newcomer with all her surprise in her eyes. To him she seemed a wraith of a woman, so white and wan was she. Her awakened soul was in her eyes. Why had he come into her life? He was such a man as she had rarely seen and never come in contact with before, and it gave an

undue importance to the hour that he was so faultlessly dressed and so well groomed and looked a very prince of men and fortune. Mrs. Buckman was groaning in spirit as she scanned him, but it is plain justice to her to say that she regarded his fashionable raiment as only so much additional temptation to Dulcie's senses.

The Colonel's tone was a little gruff.

"This is Mr. Lucian Beardsley," he said, "a sort of cousin of yours, although far removed. He has those papers from Nancy Manifold that your father wanted you to have."

Lucian advanced with the black box in his hand. He laid it on the couch near Dulcie's thin hand and saw absolute fright in her face although he spoke in a winning way.

"I have so few kinsmen and women that I must claim even distant ones."

"I am alone myself," returned Dulcie impulsively.

Their eyes met. Dulcie's hand fluttered, pitilessly nervous, over the box. The Virginian drew up a chair and sat beside her. Mrs. Buckman, in her rocker, knitted on fine thread lace with shining needles. The Colonel, on the other side, smoked his pipe.

"I have not had time to study all this out in my mind," began Lucian softly, "but this testament and medal are precious indeed. They must

have come from France with our first ancestors, the Huguenot refugees, nearly two hundred years ago. This long, coarse black hair is not a woman's. Could it have been that of our Indian great-great-grandfather? This yellow hair may be that of Willa Childress, for my grandfather's hair was once as yellow as this, he told me. And these records, my cousin? You will see that they are almost unbroken and that from our same great-grandmother comes your light locks.

Dulcie listened stupidly, amazed. It was too much to think about at once, and she was weak. But was it not all a dream? Was this man really kin to her, the quiet Kentucky woman full of sorrows and griefs?

"I do want to be good to you," went on Lucian bravely, "for I am sure you need a cousin and a brother. Do let me say it to you. I would like to see you happy."

The word was unfortunate. Dulcie shrank back and her lips quivered. Lucian pulled himself up bravely.

"Yes, I mean it. My brother Fordyce and I are able to do something. We can and will claim you, and if you do not want to stay here we will take you far away from your troubles."

Dulcie gazed at the bold speaker as a bird is fascinated by a serpent. Then she wept.

"O, Aunt Sudie, my home, my dear home!"

"You see she cannot stand words ever so kindly meant," said Mrs. Buckman at her side. "I wanted you to see for yourself. She is not strong and must be calm."

Lucian rose.

"I can wait until she understands the thought," he said pleasantly. "I meant what I said. I want to help any way I can, but it will all wait a while."

"I'll be blamed if I see just how you are going to do it," groaned the Colonel as they descended the portico steps. "You see you are not used to dealing with Kentucky women, and that's a plain fact. Dulcie was scared out in one moment. She never was a daring girl like Kitty May, and she isn't a daring woman. In a week or two she will go back to Glen Farm, seeing it as her clear duty."

"Do you mean it?" asked Lucian, stroking the nose of a hound that walked beside him. "I thought you said you never would send her back, Colonel. You did promise it."

"I never will," said the Colonel stoutly, "but she will choose to go. There is something queer about women — our women, anyhow. When they once see their duty, they just march through fire and water to do it."

"And," observed Lucian in a tone that the Colonel had learned to dread, "you still think

it is her duty to return to Dr. DeWitt in spite of all that you know is true?"

"I didn't say that, didn't say that," retorted the Colonel. "I will never ask her to return nor allow Mrs. Buckman to mention it to her — that's settled. But she'll come to it herself. One thing, her business affairs are at a pretty pass. I don't doubt from what I hear that Glen Farm and Kentucky Cupid will both have to go. By the way, I've got that horse here. Want to see him? Dulcie sent for him as soon as she could sit up."

An hour later Lucian was closeted with Beamer Van Wye in his shabby office. Both men were smoking furiously.

"I cannot tell you who holds Glen Farm mortgage," declared the lawyer. "You must move with caution, Beardsley. You don't want that place anyhow. It is only fit for grazing."

In Lucian Beardsley's soul the words burned:

"O, my home, my home!"

"Buy it and the horse if you can, and I'll keep them for her. She is going to be free. I see it in her eyes, Van Wye. She is like an animal gathering strength for a leap."

"Yet you have seen her but three times in your life," mused the lawyer.

"Three — or three thousand. It is all the same to me. There is a time when the people

live, measure quickly, decide with strength or lose life's favours. She is the only woman relative I care to claim. Since I have found her I seem changed by her need of me. Buy the farm and secure the horse if you can. Arrange it quietly."

"You will fall foul of DeWitt yet."

"Maybe. What can he do? The drug store is the great comfort of his existence. He can live anywhere."

"His wife may follow him."

Beamer Van Wye reached down his ancient hat.

"It is warm within. Let us walk toward Paradise," he continued.

The two strolled along under the trees and had walked quite a distance before the lawyer again spoke.

"Beardsley, you must not persuade that woman from her husband."

Lucian flushed darkly. His sidewise glance was almost savage in its defiance.

"There you go! Is every one leagued against the rescue of my cousin from degradation and misery? I mean to tell her that I will be her kinsman, her protector —"

He stopped short. There was a fierce light or gleam in Beamer Van Wye's eye that he did not like.

"You mean," said the lawyer, "that in your kind rashness you would ask Mrs. DeWitt to commit a folly that she would repent most bitterly in after years."

"What folly?"

"Leaving her husband on your account."

In spite of himself Lucian grew white.

"I merely mean to help her."

"I believe that is true now, but, Beardsley, I have always felt that that woman has never, never been what she could be if she had had a chance. I mean that she is like a blighted rose, and, somehow — though you may not yet know it — you feel it, also, now don't you? You long to see what she would be if there were other conditions and she was under other influences. Do you want to ruin her future for a whim?"

They were slowly entering the gates of Paradise. From the high arch the luxuriant rose-wreaths hung. In the garden birds twittered and chirped about the great beds of flowers and over the old sun-dial. Under the awnings where the light winds moved could be seen willow couches, the cushioned easy-chairs and old John grinning in an expectant welcome. The lawyer went on very softly:

"A stormy, dissatisfied childhood, a disappointment in marriage — I would not like

to think of Dulcie DeWitt's future made any darker by the breath of scandal, would you?"

There was a silence, broken only by their footsteps on the fresh gravel. Finally the Virginian spoke:

"Is there nothing — in your opinion — that I can do safely?"

"O, yes. Save the farm and the house if you will. Brighten her life by kindly words, but do not influence her at all as to her husband or her future. Let that work itself out."

"She may leave him of her own accord," flashed out the younger man, "and then?"

"Then — then — if you had honestly never interfered — I would honour you and bid you Godspeed, Beardsley."

The tall Virginian stopped at the foot of the terrace steps. His face was inscrutably grave, his eyes were alight. He held out his hand.

"Van Wye, I have never yet played the deliberate rascal. I suppose that you are right. I have felt that in regard to women I was somewhat different from my fellow-men. Perhaps that was all a mistake, for we all make mistakes in life. I have never felt — towards others — exactly as I do towards her. She is a kinswoman, but I would not hurt her. O, no! I will never persuade her. I will even go away — for a little while — and then we shall see. I will

go to Cincinnati myself, Van Wye, and see whether she chooses to return to Glen Farm. How will that do?"

For an answer the lawyer passed his arm around his companion's shoulder.

"Some day you will see matters more clearly. I know, yes, I know all that you feel. You are right; and, now, when will you go? When will you go?"

"To-morrow," replied Lucian clearly, "to-morrow night. And, in the afternoon, I will go once more to Broad Acres and tell them I am called away. She will get strong and will decide. I may never see her again. One can never calculate on a Kentucky woman's mind, the Colonel says. I will go to Cincinnati and Chicago, and buy pretty things for Paradise. Let us go in, Van Wye. Dinner is served and I am in no mood to eat it alone."

CHAPTER EIGHT

WITH GRIEF THAT'S BEAUTY'S CANKER

DULCINEA DEWITT was roused by the Virginian's visit to a more hopeless agony than she had ever felt. She could not decide on a future course, although a resolve seemed forming itself even against her will. It was that she could not return to Glen Farm. How to act, where to turn, her future abiding place — all these questions came into her mind on awaking and finally haunted the hours when she could have slept. The waters of bitterness flooded her soul even while she cried in secret, "God forgive me, but I can never return!"

Presently she grew sensitive because of the really strained atmosphere about her. Her dead father seemed to return in dreams and, with his severe yet sweet smile, bid her endure to the very end. She thought this a cruel suffering and

her outraged womanhood said sternly, "I cannot!"

A week of this so tormented Dulcie that she was alarmingly nervous and weak. Mrs. Buckman besought the Grafton doctor for stronger tonics but he shook his head.

"What is the use?" he asked.

"Then she will die."

The Colonel groaned.

"To make matters worse, Dr. DeWitt has written me, demanding her immediate return. He knows that she can walk on the porches — trust negro gossip for that. What can we do?"

Mrs. Buckman grew red with anger.

"Dulcie is not going anywhere while she is so ill. Tell him that."

"He threatened that he will advertise her."

Colonel Buckman's smile was more bitter.

"Trouble has just begun, Sudie. What does Dulcie want to do? Has she spoken of the matter?"

The wife shook her head and went out with the doctor. When she returned she said sadly:

"Dr. Snow will not say anything encouraging. You can leave that matter unanswered, Robert."

The doctor had hinted at Northern air and a change. The second day after his visit Dulcie was roused from one of her painful reveries by the sounds of a lively altercation coming

from the stable yard. It was the Colonel's voice and raised in high anger:

"How dare you come to Broad Acres? One would think you would never show your coward's face anywhere."

"I came after my wife," was the reply in an angry, snarling tone that she at once recognized. "She is able to come home, and you carried her away from my house anyhow. I'll make you all pay for it — you all coming between a man and his wife that way, shooting a man on his own place, and that's what you did, Colonel Buckman."

Dulcie's heart stood still for the Colonel's next words. She was, for the moment, full of wild terror. The Colonel's voice answered, firm and sonorous now.

"Your wife is here, but it will be only God's goodness if she is ever well again. And she shall never go from here again, Delby DeWitt, unless of her own free will. Do you hear that, man?"

The ugly voice rose again:

"D'ye hear that, Mulvihill? He refuses to give me my wife up or even to let me see her. D'ye hear that, Graham?"

"You're all a set of regular scoundrels!" cried the Colonel hotly. "A nice lot of men you are coming here to pounce upon a sick woman. No,

you cannot see her and never shall see her if I have my way."

Pressing her face close against the screen, Dulcie saw Mrs. Buckman hurrying out over the grass plot. Again the high voice she dreaded came to her ears:

"You all are keeping my wife from me. I can have action against you, can't I Mulvihill? Mr. Mulvihill is one of my lawyers, Mrs. Buckman."

"We are not keeping your wife from you," said that lady very haughtily; "she is ill and we are caring for her as her friends."

"She must come home. You all are standing between husband and wife. I'll recover damages, I will! I know my rights."

The Colonel's rage had been steadily growing.

"Leave my place or there will be trouble. Get out, all of you!" he ordered.

But Dulcie, in her thin wrapper and slippers, was in their midst, Milly dragging at her vainly. In amazement the men fell back. Dulcie's eyes, always large and pathetic, were blazing with a new wrath.

"Go home, Delby DeWitt," she said in a low voice, "go home and go alone. These people are not keeping me here. I will never return to Glen Farm as your wife. It shall be sold and the debts paid. That is my word — now go!"

"O Dulcie, Dulcie, do be careful!" cried Mrs.

Buckman, "do be careful what you say. You may feel different and forgiving when you're well. Don't say that!"

"I never will go back," announced Dulcie as quietly as before. "I want you all to bear witness that I never will go back. I have borne enough. No one has said one word to me. I have made up my mind to it myself."

The Colonel shook his heavy whip.

"Hearing that, perhaps you all will leave my premises in short order. The day of reckoning is about here, DeWitt, and it's been too long coming. That mortgage business ought to be closed up at once. We'll try to save something for Mrs. DeWitt if it can be done. Sudie, you take Dulcie into the house. The hands are coming and will clear the place."

True enough it was that the hands, warned by a flying black urchin, were now running in from the fields armed with their heavy hoes and rakes. The Colonel was a popular master; his negroes looked a formidable gang.

Dulcie walked back to the screened portico and sat down with a new vigour in her.

"I do mean it," she said to Mrs. Buckman, "I mean it. I've been coming to it for weeks, months, years. I never will go back!"

Mrs. Buckman threw her black apron up to her eyes and wept.

"It is a terrible thing after your training — and your fathah's wishes and what we all have done for you."

"My!" said Dulcie, astonished, "did you all expect I would go back?"

Mrs. Buckman sobbed and nodded.

"I suppose we all did, Dulcie. We depended on what you've been doing all along, being so patient, so enduring. I suppose we all did think you would."

"Well, I will not," said Dulcie coolly.

"O, lie down, do lie down," said the older woman hysterically, "I know you have a fever or something. It is a terrible thing to do. He is your husband, you know. All men are trying at times and you have had a great cross put upon you. But don't you say that, for you will go back when you are better, I am sure."

"No," repeated Dulcie, "no, and I'm better for having said it. It stood in the way of my getting well, Aunt Sudie. I didn't have the spirit to say it before. I wanted to decide badly enough."

"But to say it so publicly! O, Dulcie, it will be all over the county to-morrow and you'll be disgraced!"

"Me disgraced!" retorted Dulcie with a new spirit, "me disgraced? What have I done? I've been disgraced for years and years, and that's true, by what he has done."

"But to come right out there — and before the lawyers and the other men — and say that!"

"I did it to save the Colonel. They cannot say that you all influenced me now. I am not going to be afraid of anything, never any more, Aunt Sudie. I am going to live another life and be another woman if I can."

Mrs. Buckman rocked wildly to and fro, sobbing:

"I knew your mothah and your fathah. She was such a good woman! O, Dulcie, I hope you all are never going to hurt us by your actions. We all have set such a store by you."

Dulcie was pinning up her hair in its everyday fashion.

"Dear Aunt Sudie," she said, pausing with the hair-brush uplifted, "I believe I can be a better woman than ever before. I feel like I can soon believe in a God. Lately I only knew that there was a hell."

"But what are you going to do?"

"It will come to me, I suppose. I want to get the business cleared up first. I do not feel weak at all, Aunt Sudie. I want the Colonel to send for Mr. Van Wye and talk it over. It seems of no use for me to try to save Glen Farm — in fact, I don't want it. I suppose Cupid must go, too, but I have made up my mind to everything — anything."

It was a sad household for the rest of the day, and, when the excitement died away, Dulcie became more and more conscious of the strong disapproval in Mrs. Buckman. The Colonel did not appear at dinner and it was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that he drove up with Beamer Van Wye in the buggy. He looked tired and irritable.

"Is Dulcie able to come out here?" he asked after being soothed by several iced drinks and much fanning. "That mortgage business is going to be complicated by her refusal to return to Glen Farm. Does she still stick to it? Is that what you are so red-eyed about, Susan?"

Dulcie came out presently with a wan little smile that went straight to the Colonel's heart.

"You made a fine talk for my sake, didn't you?" he asked gruffly. "Who set you up to think you could live without going back to Glen Farm?"

"Nobody. I will not go," replied Dulcie slowly.

"How long since you have made up your mind to that?"

"It's been making itself up a long time, Colonel."

"Humph! Don't you feel any duty to go? He was the father of your children. Don't you re-

member that? You can never get rid of those happenings that have been in your life."

Dulcie's throat quivered.

"Do you think I've forgotten that?" she asked piteously. "It has been a chain on me for years."

"So you mean to abandon him?"

She bowed her head.

"Who's going to take care of you? Now I don't mean I'm going to turn you out, but I'm not young. How will you live on alone? You never was any account for hard work, Dulcie."

Dulcie bowed her head anew.

"You can't run the farm if we could save it. You can't manage Cupid on the racetrack. You see you must consider all these things now that your father has gone. You're just a nice, pretty, sweet, easy creature that needs some one to care for her mighty bad. What will you do alone, Dulcie?"

Dulcie shook her head under this speech and her eyes filled.

"Hadn't you better reconsider it and try a while longer?"

Then Dulcie broke down, but she cried out between her sobs:

"I will never go back if I starve, Colonel, never go back!"

Mrs. Buckman came to the rescue.

"If she will not go, don't persecute her,

Robert. She is suffering enough and she knows how we stand."

The Colonel sniffed ominously.

"There's no way for you to get this property question straightened out, Dulcie, without a legal separation."

Dulcie regarded him with unbelieving eyes. "A what?"

"A legal separation, a divorce."

"I never thought of such a thing, Colonel. Can't I just live away, keep away, like I'm doing?"

The ominous clouds cleared from the Colonel's brow, while Beamer Van Wye actually smiled.

"O, you are not after a divorce?"

"Never thought of it once," retorted Dulcie with much spirit; "I only want to keep away. I want Mr. Van Wye to go and get my clothes and a few things, and sell the rest and the place to pay off the mortgage."

The men consulted together for a few moments and then the Colonel said, more cordially:

"Well, time does smooth over a great many things. I guess we can fix matters up so they can run along a little while, Susan, and that's the best way out. I talked to the doctor from Grafton and he wants Dulcie to go to the mountains for a few weeks. I reckon it would clear

the air a heap if you would take her over to Old Sweet, and, maybe, matters will take another turn when you come back."

Two days later Lucian Beardsley, waiting impatiently in a Cincinnati hotel, received a long letter from Beamer Van Wye that made him thoughtful enough. It gave an outline of the scene in the stable-yard, Dulcie's decision, and her strong expression on the divorce question. It ended up with the news that Kentucky Cupid would be his within a week and that Colonel Buckman had sent his wife and Dulcie to some springs in Virginia of which the lawyer carelessly forgot to mention the name.

CHAPTER NINE

HERE'S TO THE PANG THAT PINCHES

I SAW no reason why I should not return," laughed Lucian to Beamer Van Wye the next night on the terrace; "this is the only home I possess, and Cincinnati is hotter than the hottest at this season. I might have gone to Virginia, it is true, but this seemed to me the best place on earth. I do not like to see you look so grave over it."

"There is so much in the future," replied the lawyer, "and we all feel as if we were walking on eggshells. Glen Farm should be sold and DeWitt is constantly in company with Mulvihill and Graham, as rascally a pair of pettifoggers as you could find. DeWitt is drinking, also, and he vows vengeance on every one connected with the affair in every Middleport and Grafton saloon. I hope he will not hear of your return or know that you have purchased Ken-

tucky Cupid. He declares that the horse is his and not Dulcie's and he also claims one-third his price of Glen Farm if sold."

"I shall send the horse up to Churchill Downs at once," said Lucian a little stiffly. "How is the Colonel?"

"He misses Mrs. Buckman every hour. They are strangely congenial, you know. I am sure that she is as lonesome as he is but conscientiously goes the rounds each day and drinks sixteen glasses of spring water. They say Mrs. DeWitt is better."

In the perfumed darkness of the rose terrace Lucian Beardsley sat a long time after the lawyer left him. He had been anxious to return to Paradise, but now it seemed strangely empty to him. Or was the emptiness, the loneliness in his own heart? He half wished he had not come to Kentucky, that he had never heard of Kentucky Cupid and his fair owner. But Dulcie, poor Dulcie, whose evil days were at hand — who else would be her champion if he failed her?

He tried to picture her, pale and sedate under Mrs. Buckman's wing at one of the Virginia springs where Southern people congregate during the summer months. He wondered if she would not look at the gaiety of the young with longing eyes. To his advanced ideas her marriage might be no bar to enjoyment, but he

doubted Mrs. Buckman's acquiescence in such ideas and felt much comforted. He wondered if Dulcie would be sought at all among the happier women. She was not exactly beautiful, but that subtle and intangible charm of hers would never pass unnoticed by men.

His doubts on this point was set at rest by a letter that the Colonel showed him. He was very lonesome and heartily glad to see Lucian or any one. He read from his wife's last letter:

"Dulcie is getting along finely now, and I never saw any one improve as she is doing. She has a great deal of attention shown her for no one knows her sad story. I would come home next week if it was not for her. We never mention any unpleasant happenings of the past. I am anxious to be at home and, if you think it wise, I will return and leave her with Mrs. Doctor Hampton of Louisville, who will remain here a month longer. Dulcie has no inclination to be gay. People think she is a widow and we never say anything. I am going to send her a few things from Lexington if her affairs are so you can get her a little money."

"I am going to write and tell her to stay and have out her fling," chuckled the Colonel. "Mrs. Doctor Hampton is as careful as Sudie herself, and I really don't want Dulcie to come home. I don't know how to spare her the money out

of the mix up her affairs are in, but I guess I'll have to make it somehow."

"I'll put another hundred on to Kentucky Cupid if you will send it right up to my cousin," proposed Lucian coolly. "I can not fix it up in any other way, I suppose."

"The horse is worth the money," said the Colonel, "so I'll go you. She can stay up there two weeks more and have some clothes on that. She'll come back well and strong and see everything in its true light. She won't be sick and morbid."

Beamer Van Wye took a different view of the delay.

"You remember what I told you about Mrs. DeWitt. If I am not mistaken it will only make her the more determined to live a different life. There is a great deal more to her than has ever shown itself."

Soon Mrs. Buckman returned from Virginia, herself improved in health and with glowing accounts of Dulcie's recovery and brightness, her docility and better spirits. Kentucky Cupid was still at Broad Acres stables, as he had had a slight touch of a prevalent equine complaint and Colonel Buckman wanted to give him his personal attention. He was later to go to Louisville and into a trainer's hands.

The two weeks sped by. It was sultry August

weather when Dulcie returned from Virginia. Events seemed at a standstill until her return. The Colonel and his wife were in wait for her at the railroad station when the train came in. They noted, not without some concern, that Dr. DeWitt was also there with his old buggy and his brown mare. The Colonel grasped his heavy whip firmly and stood upon the platform where he expected the train to pull in and Dulcie to alight.

It went on much farther, however, and when the Colonel first saw Dulcie she was in the clutches of her husband's strong fingers. As he approached with hasty footsteps he saw how beautiful returning health had made her. She was pale, but her lips were firm and her cheek full.

"I will not go with you," she said quietly as the Colonel approached.

"You must, you are my wife," declared the doctor. "Come along, I have the law on my side. I can make you and no one can interfere with me."

She endeavoured to wrench her arm loose from his grasp.

"I will not go. I am going to Broad Acres with Colonel Buckman."

"You are going to Glen Farm where you belong. If you go to Colonel Buckman's house

I'll have him in court on a writ to-morrow morning."

The doctor could say no more, for the Colonel's strong arm lifted him quite off the platform and tossed him across the track. At that moment Lucian Beardsley, followed by Summers and Beamer Van Wye, came rushing down the platform.

The doctor arose from mud and cinders with an ashen face. Lucian seized Dulcie and hurried her off to the carriage, but her husband shouted after her wildly:

"Just wait until to-morrow and you are dragged into court, Madam."

Dulcie was still very pale but walked proudly through the gathering crowd.

"Can he do it?" she asked Beamer Van Wye.

"He may be able to annoy you by some procedure," he said reluctantly.

Mrs. Buckman was shedding tears of mortification and despair.

"What disgrace! What a terrible exposure again!" she lamented as Lucian placed Dulcie in the carriage. "It has spoiled all our pleasure in your return. I do wonder if this is to be kept up."

Dulcie's colour rose and she glanced at her kinsman with a proud scorn that he noted with pain.

"It cannot be allowed to last," he said decidedly; "steps must be taken for my cousin's protection, you can see."

"I am sure I do not know what they will be," Mrs. Buckman said.

The Colonel came up much flustered and very angry.

"I suppose Mulvihill is at the bottom of this move. I wish we had kept you away a while longer, Dulcie. He will probably have me arrested to-morrow."

"May I ride out with you, Colonel?" asked the younger man. "Either Mr. Van Wye or myself should go."

"We will have Beamer," said Mrs. Buckman, as coldly as before; "we can send him home later on."

Lucian bowed. His eyes met Dulcie's. Surely her lips formed one word, but he could not be sure of it. Was it the word "to-night," and what could "to-night" mean? He could not ask, he could only surmise. He went home racked with doubts and fears.

After his dinner he bade Summers have his fleetest saddle-horse brought and he rode to the village to see Beamer Van Wye. Shortly after twilight the Colonel's own man drove the lawyer in and Lucian followed him most anxiously into the dusty little office.

"Mrs. Buckman is much worried and offended," said the lawyer, "and with good reason. I do not see but that Mrs. DeWitt must leave Grafton at least for a time."

"Where will she go?" grieved Lucian; "anywhere else it would be worse, for no one knows her real troubles."

"She must 'lie perdu' somewhere, I suppose, or go far away. DeWitt will never let her alone about here."

"How about Paradise?" asked Lucian. "I will establish her there and never set foot within its doors."

"He could enter," said Van Wye, "and it would make a fine story. She is really in a sad dilemma. Mrs. Buckman has been most patient until now."

There seemed little more to say, and Lucian turned away. As he passed out of the gate toward the horse-block the lawyer came out to the door.

"By the way, Mrs. DeWitt said for me to tell you not to forget a message she gave you. I do not know what she meant, as she hurried out after I was in the buggy. Probably you know it."

"All right," ventured Lucian. He walked his horse through Grafton, but once in the country he rode off at a gallop; his thoughts were busy enough.

To-night? Surely she had formed those words

as he looked at her. He would later go on to Broad Acres, ostensibly to see his horse. It was nearly eleven o'clock when he tied Fire Fly outside the gate and stole through the cedars and the shadows toward the stables. Suddenly he determined to approach the screened porch. Yes, Dulcie was there, pressed against the netting.

"Cousin," she breathed, opening the door a little, "I hope you understand."

"What is it? I am here."

"Go back and wait for me near the gate. Take this, please."

She thrust forth a bundle of clothing, then disappeared. He could do nothing but retrace his steps and wait within the gate where he had left his horse, in a fever of impatience. When she did come she was with him before he knew it. She had muffled a horse's feet to come over the sward silently. The horse she had was one of the best and fleetest in the Colonel's stables.

They went quite half a mile in silence, then more slowly in response to her gesture. He followed her into an out-of-the-way lane and they stopped.

"Where are you going, Dulcie, and what are you going to do?"

"I am going to hide away, cousin."

"Where?"

She faintly smiled in the starlight.

“Don’t you know where there is a little woman with much sense and a heart of goodness? I am going there—to Kitty Manifold. It is a long, lonely ride through the woods at night, but you will go with me, and return the Colonel’s horse. Will you do this, cousin?”

She stroked the horse’s mane very gently while he foamed and curvetted. Lucian’s heart leaped out to her in pride and pity.

“I will, Dulcie,” he replied, quite as softly as she had spoken. “I will certainly go with you if you wish it.”

CHAPTER TEN

PRISONER IN A RED ROSE CHAIN

SILENTLY the man and the woman rode through a grassy lane that was now dark enough, for the moon had not yet risen. The night was sultry, while, in the eastern horizon, there were coming and going constant flashes of heat lightning. Lucian Beardsley's heart beat fast with excitement. He felt all the mad folly of the hour, but he would not forego one moment of it for the pleasure it gave him to be with Dulcie alone.

It seemed, after she lost all fear of pursuit, that Dulcie showed a spirit he had never attributed to her. Her stay among strangers had bred healthfulness of mind. She looked at matters in a straightforward and courageous fashion. She spoke to Lucian of stumbling places in the lane, and promised that they would soon find, for a time at least, broader and smoother roads. He

felt that she was avoiding speech of all that was in her heart, those things of which both longed to talk but knew not how to approach.

"This is not the way the Colonel and I went to or came from the Manifold farm," said Lucian at last.

"A much more unfrequented way. I cannot risk meeting any one who knows either of us. It would not be wise."

"No, no."

"But, cousin, who can blame me? The Colonel expects to be arrested to-morrow for his assault on" — here she hesitated — "on Dr. DeWitt."

"I should not be surprised," returned Lucian tersely, "not at anything."

"I could be compelled to go as a witness. Anything public is dreadful — don't you see? I must get away. And — and I was afraid to go alone."

Lucian's very temples throbbed. It seemed a simple thing to advise her, to talk to her, to tell her that there never could be any peace on a half-way ground. It seemed a cowardly thing not to persuade her to be free, to at once break the chains that bound her, and yet — and yet — he had promised Beamer Van Wye.

"I thought you would surely talk to me, cousin," she said again and rather lightly, "that you

would keep me from sorrowful thought — perhaps advise me. I need advice, I need friends now, if ever. Do not think I am not deeply troubled.”

“My friendship shall not fail you,” he replied; “you must remember that, first of all, I hold you as my kinswoman.”

“Then tell me just what to do,” she cried out impetuously. “I must certainly help myself in some way, for the Colonel says there will not be much money left me — and I never was rich.”

“I don’t think that is the first thing,” said Lucian, leaning over in the darkness to unfasten a gate which barred their way. “It’s the situation generally, Dulcie.”

She did not reply until they were riding more swiftly along the smooth pike. Finally there came to him a faint little exclamation of hers:

“O, I am so afraid!”

“Of what?”

“Of meeting some one. It would never do, would it?”

“I am afraid not. The moon is rising. How long must we stay on this open road?”

“For a half mile more. I am sure I ought not to have asked you to come. Don’t you think so, cousin?”

Lucian pulled himself together and took hold upon her bridle.

"Whatever is done, is done. I never regret an action past. Now for a dash, for there is a buggy coming. Do not give any one time to see who you are."

In three minutes they stopped, breathless, in the darkness of another lane. Beyond could be heard the steady ripple of a river over a stony turn, and, far away, the buggy wheels going onward.

"The ford," he whispered with a sudden thought. "Dare you risk it? Dare you cross it?"

She smiled and patted the neck of her horse proudly.

"I have gone over that more than once when the water was high. Kentucky women are rarely afraid, never of a horse, only of people they do not understand or who deceive them. Go on!"

They passed swiftly along the lane where high bushes on either side held up white, starry blossoms. Between the trees, far away, a full, reddish moon came up slowly. Dulcie's hat, fastened by a strip of elastic, had fallen back. Her bare throat was as white as milk. Suddenly Lucian realized all her womanly beauty. The terrible impulse of savagery awoke in him anew, to have, to hold, to tear from any who came to interfere, this one woman of all in the world. The dream

had come to him late enough, but he had a man's intense appreciation of all it meant and he held to its sweetness.

"Dulcie!" he cried out, stopping short.

She started at his new tone.

But before the rash words he was about to speak came from his lips a sentence spoke itself out of the darkness: —

"Do you want to ruin her future for a whim?"

"Who spoke, Dulcie?" he said hoarsely, "who spoke?"

"No one. Indeed, no one. What was it?" she said, trembling sorely. "Who was it?"

But the man was himself again, in his own strong grasp. He saw that she was much shaken by his question.

"I merely imagined a voice. We are both nervous. Now for the ford. Be careful — watch the horse. You are sure you know the right trees on the bank?"

She pushed ahead and, after swimming the horses for a short distance, they safely reached the pebbly bank. Lucian regarded Dulcie's horsemanship with admiring eyes as she shook out her upfolded skirt.

"We have not far to go now," she said a few moments later. "And you really must leave me at the barn lot. I will wait in the porch until morning and by that time you will be back in

Grafton if you will ride swiftly. You can keep to the high roads now."

He could not object.

"Am I to see you or to hear from you?"

She reflected a little while.

"Send Mr. Van Wye to see me the day after to-morrow," she finally announced, "and by that time I will have made up my mind."

She evidently expected him to ask a question, but he dared not. He lifted her down at the barn-yard gate and stood facing her, standing with the two bridles over his arm and quite close.

"I wish I knew that you were really safe," he said, "safe forever from any harm."

She laughed out but mirthlessly. He felt that she was disappointed in him, that she had hoped for positive advice from him. It was her nature to lean, to ask, to be assured, and he was so sure, so sure what ought to be done without any further scruples. What held him back from bidding her free herself, ensure her property and safety? Something intangible, terribly resistless, that fairly thundered in his ears the stern command, "Speak not!"

"I feel that I have been silent — cold, perhaps, Dulcie," he said at last and not very steadily after his struggle. "I am so very sorry for you, but you are a woman, and some things you must decide for yourself. One thing for good-night:

Send me word of anything I can do for you by Van Wye — that's all. I will watch you to the porch. Good-night! I send my compliments to Mistress Kitty. Good-night!"

His return was a swift, silent run through the glorious moonlight. It wanted but a half hour of the summer dawn when Lucian led the Colonel's horse into the stable. He woke up the groom who had care of Cupid and bade him attend the Colonel's weary horse, feeing him well for secrecy. As he turned away on his own black a figure darkened the door. It was the Colonel with his whip in his hand. He had evidently been waiting. The two men walked away a few steps, then the Colonel broke out hoarsely:

"Where did you take her?"

Lucian's blood surged in hot waves in his veins. He realized his position in a second. Dulcie had demanded a fearful price of him for the privilege of kinship. He tried to speak quietly:

"Colonel, she is in hiding to save herself and you. She does not want you, not any one to know, until later on."

"Is she at Paradise?"

"You mistake us both. She is with friends."

"I saw her go. I mistrusted you from the first. Why did you coax her away? I would have taken her any place. Do you think it was right, you scoundrel and devil!"

Lucian flushed in the darkness and his teeth met with a sharp click.

“Colonel, I do not.”

“Do you know what you’ve done? My wife will never have her here again. It is all your fault. She was the meekest, the most uncomplaining creature, and but for you she would have finally returned to her home.”

The hearer stood immovable, silent, his mouth sternly set. Something in his attitude struck like ice to the Colonel’s heart — was he a man or was he a brilliant, heartless demon who would toss aside this woman he had hidden away as if she was a toy? He crept quite close to Lucian and whispered fearfully:

“But you’ll marry her, Beardsley, promise me that. She is my old friend’s little girl and she has been very near to us. When all’s over you’ll marry her, won’t you? Or she will be lost.”

A surging heat and anger tingled in Lucian Beardsley, a singing sound in his ears. He could have struck the Kentuckian where he stood for his cruel words. Once more he held himself well in leash and, looking into the red, quivering face, he said with a tired tolerance:

“I will certainly marry her if she is ever free, and is willing, Colonel; for it may be she will not have it, you know.”

Then he turned down the avenue while the

waking birds chirped. A sick sensation, nearer akin to disgust of life than he had ever before experienced, took hold on him. He rode slowly homeward wondering how it fared with Dulcie and whether there could be anything more complex than his present relations with his little world.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MEN'S VOWS ARE WOMEN'S TRAITORS

ON the afternoon after the night ride Dulcinea DeWitt sat upon the broad upper gallery of the Manifold farmhouse with some mending in her fingers and the mistress of the house for a companion. Their position commanded a view of the entrance lane and the grass plot below, where Aunt Reba sat with infant Eustace, the centre of an admiring group of small negro children. The two women were deep in conversation and Kitty had a heightened colour.

"I'm sure it was mighty kind of Mr. Beardsley to say such a fine thing of me, Dulcie DeWitt, but law! how can I tell what is the best thing for you to do?"

"What would you do in my place?" asked Dulcie absently. Her thoughts were evidently far away.

"O my," cried Kitty May, "I couldn't tell. If Eustace's pa ever did act badly — well, I just can't say what I'd do. Something pretty strong, surely. I do feel so sorry for you, and now don't you cry, Dulcie."

"It will not hurt me," quivered Dulcie, "there have been times when I could not cry; they were the worst times. You never can tell what it is to see a little baby die and to feel that it was its father's fault."

"My poor dearest," soothed Kitty May, "I cannot imagine life without Eustace — not at all. But suppose you had them now? it would be worse. You just could not leave that man."

"I would have had to leave long ago," sighed Dulcie, "for no innocent child should be in such a life as I have led. Why, even the negro women would not have a child about our house. You see you cannot imagine how things were, Kitty May."

The little woman nodded her head emphatically. She looked comfortable in a gown of ample dimensions, and watched the group below in a contented assurance.

"Of course we've heard heaps o' things," she ventured slowly, "but I always calculate that gossip is only about one grain truth and the rest is hatefulness. Peter and I never did feel that your neighbours over there ought to have stood so

much wickedness, but law! folks do hate to get stirred up and interfere. It isn't that they believe each person's got particular rights, either. It is that it is easier not to interfere and that's the truth. It is lots o' trouble to be your brother's helper or keeper, isn't it? Peter never has had any grudge against you, but Nancy was set in her ways. She's gone now and we take it kindly that you came here — and you just stay if you want to. If I ring that bell there it won't take more'n a few minutes for fifteen niggers to come a runnin', and Peter won't stand any nonsense, not if he does look easy."

Dulcie's face was very grave.

"I know. It is very kind but I really think I had better leave Grafton. It seems like I'll have to go. I don't want to go. I have no friends other places, but the doctor will never let me alone."

"I hope the doctor won't come here," said Kitty May earnestly, "because Peter has really got a most curious temper with any real mean folks."

"That — and many other reasons — make me feel that I must go. It has brought trouble on Colonel Buckman, who defended me. It will always bring trouble wherever I go unless I hide away. I think I will tell my distant cousin, Mr. Beardsley, and maybe he can arrange something

for me in Texas or in California. He has travelled about a great deal."

"It does seem to me," cried Kitty May, "that you haven't done anything wrong but are really running away just as if you had. I wouldn't run away. I would stay here and fight it out."

Dulcie looked at her keenly.

"How can I?"

"I would have my property rights if I had to get a divorce."

Dulcie grew very pale.

"You know you would have no trouble getting it," went on Kitty, "and Peter says if you are not going to live with Dr. DeWitt it is the best thing to do to avoid scandals. Doctor DeWitt is a beast — every negro knows it — and that's the truth."

Dulcie blushed with shame and mortification.

"I am going away," she gasped, "going so far he can never find me. I feel all that."

"But he will follow you," asserted Kitty most decidedly; "you don't understand men as well as I do. The best o' them sort o' feels, when he gets a marriage license, that he is getting a clutch on to something he can treat as he pleases and sometimes work out his salvation on. Sometimes the woman can handle him right and make her own way smooth, but, in other cases, she is real help-

less, like you, to oppose him in his born cussedness, as Peter calls it. Dr. DeWitt thinks he owns you, soul and body, and would follow you to California or South America if he got a hint as to where you were. And, Dulcie," here Kitty May lowered her voice, "such terrible things do happen. We read about them in the papers. My blood just runs cold sometimes."

Kitty May was an inveterate reader of newspapers and for that reason knew the outside world far better than her hearer.

"And as for your cousin, Mr. Beardsley, about the finest man I ever saw, Dulcie, you can't let him help you much. Folks will talk in a minute as long as you ain't free. Yes, you needn't get so red. I'm not saying a word against him or you. It is just the fact that you are in such a bad fix that makes it hard for him to help you."

"But he seems to want to, and he is so strong!"

"Strong as a lion, it will do him no good if talk gets started about you all. He may not care — some men don't — but law! I got a better opinion of him, I have."

Dulcie threw the sewing down and her eyes were once more stormy and wet.

"I see, I see. I am all alone. I have to stand alone as I have done all these years — and kept still, too, and stood everything and anything.

Seems like everything is bound to drive me back, but I won't go — I'll go to the river first."

"Now don't you feel so badly over what I've said."

"It's true enough. It's been in me all the time. I have suffered for years fighting for an idea, Kitty May. I believed that divorce was wrong. But it has come to that pass that life at Glen Farm is more wicked than divorce. Divorce is wicked, separation will not 'love and cherish' Doctor DeWitt as I promised — but life at Glen Farm is something right out of hell. Don't start! You can never know. I would not tell you. It is getting worse every day. Now out of three wickednesses I've got to choose one. When all ways are wicked, which way shall I go?"

Kitty May was pale but she set her lips.

"Dulcie DeWitt, there's lots more to you than we all knew about. You are hunting daylight in a nasty cellar, poor dear. I never knew, nor Peter, either, that you had any such feelings. Now, when it comes to doing right and wrong, there's two sides to the question and I can answer you straight out. You asked me a while back if I was in your fix what I would do. I'll tell you now, since you asked me. Don't you be dragged clear to the earth by that man as he has dragged others. I wouldn't have one scruple about a divorce, not I, in your fix. Why, Dulcie, if you go by

Bible reasons that man has broken his contract with you and smashed every commandment. And the Bible gives one reason for divorce if you want it straight out."

"O!" cried Dulcie. The women gazed at each other, trembling yet fascinated.

"It takes a real friendly person to tell the meanest things to one," blustered Kitty May, "and since I'm sure you don't know, I'll set your poor mind at rest. I owe Doctor DeWitt a grudge and I'm going to pay it up in his own coin. I'll show you a Bible reason or two right on our side of the river. Aunt Reba!" she called over the rail, "have Silver Wings put into the light buggy."

"Where are we going, Kitty May?" gasped Dulcie.

"I won't tell you now, but you have got to have your mind eased up. A pity the Colonel never looked into a few things, but law! men are men the world over. It is all right until the thing is found out on one, then the other men say how foolish all that is. I know them real well."

Four miles up the river bank Kitty May drove Dulcie. It was a wild and lonesome way. Beyond the roadway were hills and hollows, at times a bit of field and only narrow lanes and bridle paths to lead across and up to the farms on the high-

lands. A picturesque road it was, lovely and tangled in summer growth and bloom and with the bright and slipping river always to the right hand shining with many curves and turns, with creeks coming down the hollows and emptying gently into the larger and quieter streams.

The houses below the hills were mere cabins and huts. Opposite one of them Kitty May drew up.

"Dulcie," she said gently, "I'm going to make you feel mighty bad, but don't you show it. I want you to see this place and go into the house."

She drove over the edge of a field into the very dooryard. A woman appeared with several small children clinging to her skirts. She was still young, and had once been beautiful and she was nearly white; indeed, might have passed for a white woman on the streets of a Northern city. She was bareheaded and barefooted and the children were as little clothed as possible.

"Good-morning, Della. Have you a setting of Buff Cochins? It is a little late for setting but we'll try it."

The woman looked at her with radiant eyes.

"Lawd, Mis' Kitty, it air good foah sore eyes ter see you. How's your paw? Run out in the wood, Leroy, and see erbout them nestes in thet holler oak. Thar orter be some aigs thar."

A slim boy scudded off on the instant, eager to be back.

"How is your crippled boy, Della?" asked Kitty May. "I hope you give him good care."

The woman laughed out.

"He air allers a heap better off than any one of us. 'Pears laike he allers comes out top o' the heap. Light an' see 'im, Miss Kitty. He don't offen see folks."

Kitty May accepted the invitation and, to Dulcie's surprise, whispered:

"I want you to go inside."

The cabin had three good-sized rooms, one careless and dirty enough, the others fairly furnished. There was a strange familiarity about some of the things that at first puzzled Dulcie. Then she recognized a plaid blanket that had once been her father's and her heart stood still. It was thrown over the knees of a distorted cripple, a boy that was almost a monster in his deformity and his expression of cunning and malice. His hair was brown, his eyes blue and his skin strangely dusky and repulsive indeed. Yet Dulcie saw a terrible likeness.

"How do you do, Felix?" said Kitty May kindly; "are you growing stronger?"

The boy glared at her with strange, vague eyes.

"I want my pa," he said hoarsely, "I want my pa!"

"Heah's the nice ladies," said his mother apologetically; "this hyah's a lady I uster play wid a long spell ago."

"Whar war that?" queruously complained the boy; "I never heered o' that. Whar war it?"

"Up on them hills," was the reply, with a wave of the hand.

The boy refused to talk to the strangers, although his eyes followed every movement. Dulcie's eyes also roamed and saw many things from Glen Farm.

"How many children have you?" she asked the woman stiffly enough, "there seems to be a great many and you so young."

"I hev seven, ma'am," returned Della; "they all's lots o' work an' bother, tuh, but whut's a woman tuh do? I jes' can't keep 'em cleaned up none."

The setting of eggs came in and Kitty May was ready to go. As a farewell Dulcie gazed at the cripple boy earnestly. He flung a savage curse at her.

Half a mile farther to a turn and here Kitty May threw the "setting" into the bushes.

"Well, Dulcie?"

"How far is this from Glen Farm?"

"It is a mile and a half through your bit of woodland right over the river. He always has a boat there."

"Those wretched children!"

"The wretched woman, too! Dulcie, she was brought up on my father's farm and her mother was almost white. Della was real smart and bright, but he got hold of her long before he married you and she is now what you see. I could shoot him when I remember all this. Well, Dulcie, there are shorely seven Bible reasons, you see, for your future deliverance. You can go on now."

Dulcie sat like a woman of stone. In her heart was a wild anger and resentment, felt at her own blindness in the past rather than at Doctor DeWitt. The idea of his infidelity was no new one, but she had tried not to know the actual truths because she did not really care. She burned with rage to think that she had not long ago had the spirit and wish to know the truth.

The next morning Dulcie came down to the family breakfast in her black riding dress, and when Maria had gone out into the kitchen for more coffee, she said in a firm voice:

"Peter and Kitty, I have made up my mind to go right back to Grafton."

Both stared at her tone and expression.

"I will go back this morning and will try to have my affairs arranged. It is because of what Kitty said yesterday to me — that I had not done

anything of which to be ashamed and it was not for me to run away."

"Good, good!" cried Kitty May, "but you will not go to the farm."

"No, no," replied Dulcie, a look of great pain on her face, "I will go to the hotel until I arrange some place to live. There I will be independent of any one, I hope."

Kitty May clapped her hands.

"There's some sense and spirit in that. Glen Farm is yours and you all must get out. Now I tell you what it is, Peter. If she feels that way it is the very best thing. We'll hitch up and go in with her and stay all night. You can ride the brown mare and take Davis and I'll take Aunt Reba in the carriage for Eustace. We'll make it a day and a night there."

Peter grumbled a little about leaving his colts, but finally gave up to his small tyrant. So it came about that, about twelve o'clock, the Manifold carriage drew up in front of the Grafton House and from it descended, with great dignity, plump and pretty Mrs. Manifold, Aunt Reba, very stately with the Manifold heir in her arms and, to every one's surprise, Mrs. DeWitt in a riding dress.

This sight took away the very breath of Colonel Buckman and Beamer Van Wye, who were standing at the bar when the carriage drove up.

The ladies disappeared up the narrow front stairway and the tall form of Peter Manifold darkened the hall door.

"Howdy, Colonel, howdy, Van Wye! Hot day. Yaas, a julep and three small ones up-stairs, Linas," to the host; "the gentlemen 'll drink with me, of course, Linas."

There being no reason why the gentlemen should not drink with him, they adjourned to a round table. Peter stretched his legs as the host wiped off the table and set down the glasses.

"Get another three ready," ordered the same soft voice, "and, Linas, that big room next the parlour up-stairs — just do fix that up for the ladies. We'll be here all night, anyhow. Davis will see to the team."

He sat down and smiled in his gentle way at the two men.

"Wife wants a little outing so we came in with my cousin Dulcie. You see we call her 'cousin' because that box business has made away with all those old differences, Colonel. Kitty May and her get on splendidly."

"So she has been out to your house?" questioned Van Wye slowly.

"That she has," said Peter; "we invited her to make her home there until things settle down. Maybe she will, maybe she will."

It was a study to see Colonel Buckman's face.

"You all see," drawled Peter, his mild gaze on the men, "you all see she ought to be on the ground jes' now to see after her business affairs and she had the grit to say so. She said she calkilated she'd get a room here at the hotel for a few days until she knew what to do."

"You never are telling about Dulcie DeWitt?" scoffed the Colonel.

"I am," went on Peter with an incidental wave to Linas, "and she seems right waked up. She says she don't calkilate to make any trouble to any one no more. But she's plumb welcome to stay out with us. My niggers don't want nothing bettah, gentlemen, than to bluff that crazy doctor if he'd come around there."

"Since I was made," pronounced the Colonel, red and emphatic over his second glass, "I never heard of such a thing — Dulcie that spirited? Lord, Beamer, what do you make of that?"

Beamer was gazing at the flies on the ceiling and his glass was empty as he winked solemnly at the Colonel.

Peter smiled his peculiar and sweet smile.

"Let's have another and join the ladies. You all never saw our young gentleman yet, have you? He's a great fellow."

They presently filed up the oilcloth-covered stairs into the upper parlour. The ladies were already in possession of the big room next and were

making themselves as much at home as possible. Dulcie welcomed them quietly, but Beamer Van Wye at once recognized the subtle defiance in her manner. Kitty May was always the same, sturdy, smiling, playful, showing off Eustace proudly, and alert for every opportunity to assert her individuality. It was sheer audacity that carried away the embarrassment of the occasion.

"We all wanted Dulcie to stay out with us," she chirped, "but it's too far for any business. You surely will be able to save something from the farm, you two men. It cannot be all gobbled up unless the man who holds the mortgage is a regular Jew."

Dulcie uttered a low exclamation, but, ere she could speak, Colonel Buckman broke out:

"I now hold the principal one, Mistress Kitty."

The little bungler skilfully covered her mistake by a cry of joy.

"Well, that does take a heap off my mind, Colonel! I know you. You are square. Cheer up, Dulcie, after that good news. Why, the Colonel is just like a father to you."

"I tried to be," grunted the Colonel, "but she ran away to you. What can you all say to that?"

"I was so afraid I would have to go into court," said Dulcie sweetly. "I'm not so afraid to-day. Did anything happen?"

"No; he spent the day in one of his stupors over at Middleport."

"You'd better send Dulcie's things up here, Colonel," went on Kitty May, bravely; "she's going to put up here until something is arranged. Dulcie does not want to feel that she is bringing trouble on any one, and, at a hotel, things are all open and above board. I do think it will look queer for her to be here and that man in possession of Glen Farm that is her's and not his. Why don't you oust him, gentlemen?"

"He has some right there unless there is a legal separation," said Beamer Van Wye, "and that is the whole trouble. Mrs. DeWitt has announced that she does not want a divorce."

"She may change her mind," spoke up the little woman sharply. "Do grant her that right since she has been over the river, please. Dulcie is bound to understand things now."

The three men stared at each other. Dulcie grew even paler, but she spoke out:

"I must have a little more time to decide. I will stay here for the present and would like my clothes sent up from the farm, Colonel, if you can manage it."

This broke the Colonel down completely.

"You must come home with me. I was furious with Beardsley for taking you away, but I do not believe that either of you meant any harm by go-

ing. I can trust you for your father's child, can't I?"

Peter and Kitty Manifold glanced up quickly and a shade crossed the latter's face. Dulcie leaned forward in her chair.

"Didn't you go away on Thursday night with Lucian Beardsley, your distant cousin?"

"I did," promptly replied Dulcie, for once thoroughly roused, "but he did not take me away. I sent for him to go with me to Peter's and I think it was a big mistake of mine. I sent him a message by Mr. Van Wye. He came out to see what I wanted and I never told him what I was going to do until I was on the horse and out in the road. Then I asked him to take me to Kitty May so that, if the doctor did act badly, I could not be found."

Beamer Van Wye smiled in a weary and peculiar fashion.

"What asses we were! The Colonel called your courteous cousin a scoundrel that night and cut him publicly yesterday. I shut my office door in his face last night."

"And he never said a word?" cried Peter, rather harshly for him.

"Not a word."

"Well you're a pack of fox hounds!" cried Peter, his tones rising sharp and shrill, "and you don't know a sneak from a gentleman. D—

your airs, you all! If you don't apologize to him, I'll cut the whole string of you. Where is he? I'm going to find him and bring him right here. Yes, I will, Dulcie. He's the best friend we all have got in Grafton."

But Dulcie was lost in woe. She began to realize how beset with danger was her path, that every step she took seemed to involve others and that friendliness to her was more than dangerous. The Colonel was thoroughly contrite and humble.

"I guess I'm a fool, Peter," he acknowledged at once, "but appearances were deceitful. Who ever thought Dulcie sent for him? Dulcie, you better be more discreet and not be getting us into any more trouble than you have to, you poor child."

At which Dulcie wept on his shoulder and they made it up with more feeling on either side than the spectators at all enjoyed.

Lucian was sitting alone that night on the terrace at Paradise. He was trying to comprehend his exact situation and to decide on his next move. That Colonel Buckman, Van Wye and all Grafton should be his enemies did not at all surprise him. He had, somehow, expected it. He felt a little surprise at Van Wye. Money had never failed to appeal to a lawyer before, but this man was of a different metal. He felt sorry to have Van

Wye think him dishonourable, but what was it all to having met poor Dulcie's wish?

"I will ride out and see her to-morrow, and if she wants a lawyer we will get one from Lexington, one who will see her through. Van Wye cannot act for her and for the Colonel also unless we are all friends."

In a pleasant reverie, not much disturbed by the rudeness of the two men, Lucian spent several hours in his steamer-chair on the terrace. Summers came up after dinner with a number of letters and, just as the Virginian was about to enter the house to read them, he heard lively voices at the gate-way. Colonel Buckman, Van Wye and Peter Manifold had spent the entire afternoon together and were now in a most genial mood. It made Lucian smile to see the three figures, linked arms. The Colonel, short and stout, was in the middle, the tall, stooped lawyer to the right, Peter Manifold, lank and awkward, to the left. Here, indeed, were three of Nature's noblemen, of the truest Kentucky stamp and with the best Kentucky whisky down their throats.

In strong contrast, Lucian Beardsley stood erect, well knit, handsome, coolly waiting to hear their business.

"Beardsley, old boy," began the Colonel, "we've come up, Beam and I, to say we're damn foolish. We know all about the other night. It was

the old trouble 'the woman tempted,' and thatsh all right Beardsley, 'cause I been there myself. She asked you to go and you never split on her. You're all right, sir. Peter Manifold saysh I must apologize and I have apologized now, Peter, haven't I? Wasn't that real handsome, eh? An' you needn't to marry her, Beardsley, 'cause she ish going to please me and go right back to her husband, ain't she, Beamer, eh? She'll do it to pleash me."

Peter, somewhat overome by his walk, sat down upon the terrace step, but the lawyer stood up unsteadily and then and there delivered the following burst of eloquence:

"There are times in the memory of man when the chords of his whole being are touched by strong hands. Then sounds in his soul some immortal strains that make him realize that he, too, is akin to angels. That strong hand swept my heart-strings to-day, Mr. Beardsley, when I found that you had been silent when one little sentence would have cleared you. I ask your forgiveness, sir."

Lucian shook his outstretched hand with a gay laugh. He did not wonder that there was a saying in the county that to have Beamer Van Wye win a jury case he must be "not too drunk, but just drunk enough."

CHAPTER TWELVE

PLUCK FROM THE MEMORY A ROOTED SORROW

TO Colonel Buckman's profound astonishment Dulcie would not promise him to return to Broad Acres the next morning. Peter, listening to her refusals, likened her to a good colt who had the bit in her teeth and really enjoyed it. The Colonel was quite himself. He spent the night in Grafton and wanted Dulcie as an excuse when he went home. As he could not secure her, he lingered and, lingering, knew that he was quite lost when he saw the Broad Acres carriage drive up to the hotel and Mrs. Buckman in her best array alight and make inquiries for him of the obsequious Linas. The Manifold party was sitting in the upper gallery, off the parlour guest-room, and the Colonel had to "face the music," as he phrased it, in the parlour. The interview was not long. That all depended on the Colonel's humour. A broad grin was on the black

waiter's face when he presently appeared and announced that Mrs. Buckman wished to see Mrs. DeWitt in the parlour.

"I'm going right in with you," announced Kitty. "I'm not afraid of madame, if the Colonel is."

Dulcie squeezed her fat hand.

"You'd better keep out of it," growled Peter. "Women shouldn't scrap."

"No, only men," retorted Kitty, who had on a good gown and knew she looked very pretty, "and a fine mess they do make of it and their reconciliations."

She so evidently referred to the revel of the night before which had ended by Lucian driving the three men to the hotel at midnight in the dashing drag, that Peter hung his head. Dulcie and Kitty May opened the big parlour door and went in hand-in-hand. The Colonel was sitting doggedly upright on a horsehair sofa, while Mrs. Buckman was more upright in an arm-chair before him. She stared coldly at Kitty May, who bubbled over at once.

"How do you do, Mrs. Buckman? So glad to see you!"

Mrs. Buckman drew in her lips, those lips that could be so gentle when she chose.

"How do you do, Mrs. Manifold? I wanted to see Mrs. DeWitt. The Colonel won't go home

without you, Dulcie. Perhaps you can explain to me first why you left our house last Thursday night to seek shelter elsewhere."

"She did it to save me — thought I'd be arrested and she'd have to testify, that's what!" growled the Colonel, "and I won't leave her here, so I won't! I want her at Broad Acres."

"That's true," broke in Kitty May. "She just knew I'd gladly keep her and that she was safe at our house."

"But you went away at night, Dulcie," said the distressed lady, "and Colonel Buckman never slept at all. I thought the horses were sick when he stayed out, but it was because he was so worried by your absence. How did you get over to the Manifold place at night? Did you go alone?"

"No."

"Who went with you? Dr. Snow told me yesterday he thought he passed you on the pike about one o'clock. He said that a tall man was with you."

Dulcie felt cold all over, but before she could speak Kitty chimed in again.

"So there was. It was Peter. He got word and went to meet her."

"Is that so, Dulcie? Did you go expecting to meet Mr. Peter Manifold?"

Dulcie's head went up.

"Yes, I did, Aunt Sudie." It was her first deliberate lie.

Mrs. Buckman mused.

"Well, that isn't quite so bad. Is Mr. Manifold about?"

"I'll fetch him," said his spouse, who, as she went out, actually banged the door. There would always be an enmity between her and Mrs. Buckman for inexplicable reasons. Kitty May went straight to her husband, who still looked gloomy.

"Want to make up, Peter?"

He reached out his long arm.

"Well, I should say so."

"Go in and lie, Peter. Tell the old lady that you went to meet Dulcie and brought her to your home. You must."

"I'm no good at lying, Kit. It's bad doings."

"What — after all those trickv horse sales and races? Now, Peter!"

"What am I to say?"

"Tell Mrs. Buckman that you had word and met Dulcie at Summer's Lane. Stick to it and don't you say too much. Be like the Prince of Wales, Peter, and lie like a gentleman. No one will spoil it for you."

Whereupon Peter marched into the parlour and told Mrs. Buckman, in most freezing tones,

that Mrs. DeWitt could always count on him in any time of trouble and that he had aided her and would aid her all he could.

Mrs. Buckman had, strange to say, always been a trifle in awe of Peter Manifold. His voice was too gentle and his manner too easy for a normal human being, she thought. So she said to Dulcie, who was red with the confusion of the thing, that she hoped she would return to Broad Acres for her own sake.

"You must really excuse me, Aunt Sudie," returned Dulcie. "I will not go to any house just now. I must stand alone for a time and not annoy other people until everything is settled. I do thank the dear old Colonel," with a sad smile, "but I have decided."

Kitty May smiled at the intense relief in Mrs. Buckman's face, and she patted Dulcie on the back as they left the pair to arrange the terms of the Colonel's return. Kitty at once fell rapturously upon Peter and declared his acting perfect. When Lucian Beardsley called after dinner he found every one in a high good humour and the Colonel carried away by his triumphant spouse.

It was the first time that Lucian Beardsley had ever had any opportunity to talk alone to his cousin save on the night of the stolen ride. It is true also that Kitty left Aunt Reba and the sleep-

ing Eustace with her for propriety's sake while she went out with Peter to make some purchases. Aunt Reba was much like a chocolate figure-head, unhearing and unseeing. Dulcie in her black gown looked fair and calm. She held in her hand a scarlet fan of Kitty May's that reflected a glow upon her cheeks.

"You decided to return here, cousin."

"Yes, I want to save something of my property, if I can."

"And then?"

"Perhaps, to go away. That, however, would be cowardly, for I have done nothing wrong."

He sat still, gazing at her. There was a stir in his blood whenever he looked that way. She noted his gaze with a look of surprise that made him say quickly:

"I am glad you are so brave. But you cannot stay here. I wish I could offer you Paradise but I cannot, can I?"

"No, you cannot. How long are you going to stay in Grafton?"

"It depends on you."

"On me?"

"Altogether."

She was much startled and looked vaguely about for aid.

"Why on me?"

"Because when I see what you are going to do

with your life, I shall try to help you. I cannot until you decide."

"Which way?"

He drew himself together.

"Any way — either way."

She walked to the railing and looked over into the street.

"I do not see what you can do for me. I am lost. I have lived my life and am dead. Every one of my friends are very kind and tender to me, but I am dead, cousin, dead and yet alive!"

"Ah!" His self-control was very hard-pushed.

"What is it?"

"A fly near the child. Your friends are all very anxious on your account, cousin."

"Yes."

"I wish you would decide, so that we would know finally and decide what your future is to be."

"Suppose," she said in a half whisper, "suppose I desire to go far away. Will you help me?"

"Ask me after — after you decide," he said quite as quietly. "I really must not influence you, Dulcie, not at all."

"I think," she said to him presently, "I think a great change has come over you since we first met. Then you seemed so eager to do — and act — and now?"

"Now I am in curb," he replied. "At that

time I had given the matter too little real thought. Now it haunts me day and night."

"Day and night," she repeated softly, "day and night?"

In a little time she again turned her face from the street and said:

"You are quite right. It is cowardly in me not to face the thing alone. I will try to let you know in ten days what I am going to do."

"That is?" he queried

"That is, whether to satisfy some of my friends by going back to Glen Farm, or whether to satisfy my soul, I disappear; or, to satisfy my common-sense, I stay here and fight it out."

He leaned over the rail by some quick impulse. His eyes at once met the shifting blue ones of the mad doctor who was standing below. A desire to protect Dulcie made him take her arm and lead her into the parlour.

"DeWitt is below," he said. "Go to your room and lock yourself in. I will remain here until the return of Mr. and Mrs. Manifold."

When Dr. DeWitt peered stealthily into the parlour a few minutes later he saw only the young Virginian, who, seated in a shady corner, was intently reading from a paper-covered book which was, in truth, only a fly-specked medicine almanac.

The Manifolds returned to their home the

following morning, Peter declaiming that the colts would be ruined if he stayed away a minute longer. Before they left, however, Colonel Buckman, Milly and Dulcie's trunks arrived at the hotel, and between the two men Linas was made to feel the great importance and responsibility of Mrs. DeWitt's stay with him and to give the strictest orders in regard to loafers and strollers in the house, Dr. DeWitt in particular. Dulcie herself had no apprehensions but walked out each afternoon with Milly and spent her time reading and sewing. She had her meals served to her in her room. Lucian did not try to see her or to offer her any civilities that would cause comment. He bowed to her while riding by and sometimes saw her seated upon the gallery. When the ten days were up, he would once more openly see her and hear her decision.

It was, therefore, with the utmost surprise that he saw, from his window, quite early on the morning of the eighth day, the quiet lawyer, Beamer Van Wye, fairly running up the avenue. It had rained the night before, a heavy rain accompanied by high winds, thunder, and lightning. Van Wye saw no puddles in his way and even disregarded the flower beds. The man was in dire trouble.

Lucian met him in the vestibule. The lawyer's face was white and drawn.

"Have you heard?"

"Heard? What?"

"Mrs. DeWitt is gone — stolen out of her room last night and some of her clothing was picked up on the road out of town."

Lucian motioned the lawyer into his bedroom and finished his toilet without calling John.

"Who has done such a thing?"

"Dr. DeWitt, of course."

"Where is he? Have they got him?"

"He is in town now."

"In custody?"

"Why no. You can't arrest a man for stealing his own wife."

"What does he say?"

"Smiles and says nothing."

"Are they hunting for her?"

"We're going to, the Colonel, you and I and every man who will volunteer. We've sent for Peter Manifold, and Ethelbert Sugg has six men on horseback now."

Lucian touched the bell, and while John finished his toilet gave rapid orders to Summers. It was astonishing how quick were his thoughts. There were good horses in his stables, three of which he, Van Wye and Summers would ride. The gardener was to hire an extra horse and report at once at the hotel, John to be there with

the drag and team and two detectives at once telegraphed for from Lexington.

There was little more news for Lucian at the hotel. Milly always slept in her mistress's room on a mattress. She remembered nothing after the two had retired until she wakened, long past her usual hour and found the window shutters open and her mistress gone. A bed blanket but no outer clothing was missing, no hat or cloak. There were muddy footsteps on the gallery floor and there could be but one inference. Dulcie had been actually stolen away in the night.

At the cross-roads just north of town had been found a stocking and a bit of underwear. These Milly identified at once, but said, with the simplest common-sense:

"She nevah take dat waist ner one stocking wid her. Some one else took dem tricks an' put 'em thar."

When Lucian in hunting garb rode up to the hotel, one of the first persons he saw in an excited crowd was Dr. DeWitt with his familiar, the lawyer Graham, from Middleport. He met Ethelbert Sugg near the door.

"Sugg," he said, "find me the sharpest men in Grafton who will work to-day for money."

The tall Kentuckian considered for a few moments and went out. He returned, accompanied by a pale shoemaker that Lucian recog-

nized, and the township clerk. It was a simple thing Lucian asked of them in exchange for good wages. They were not to lose sight of Dr. DeWitt until the Lexington detectives arrived.

"He may have her," he thought grimly, "but he'll never see her again alive if I can help it."

The crowd in the hotel bar seemed divided as to whether to join in the search or not.

"If Dr. DeWitt's got his wife, I don't feel no call to interfere," said the village blacksmith in his strong voice. "Not to come between husband and wife. I wouldn't like it myself."

"Nor I! Nor I!" said other voices.

"Why don't he say he's got her?" called out another. "A man don't have to crawfish any about seeing his wife. Let him speak out like a man."

"I don't choose to say a word," yelled the doctor. "I know the law. The law always is on my side, and my wife and I could get along if there wasn't so much interfering. I don't have to say anything."

"Take care you do know the law and all the law," said Beamer Van Wye sneeringly; "you might be too sure."

"Ain't I got the law, Graham?" shouted the doctor. "Ain't I?"

But Graham had disappeared for the time being and the doctor blinked and sneered alone.

A search party was quickly organized. So many were eager for the northern roads that two parties were sent out from the hotel but in opposite directions. Beamer Van Wye had at once set a small printing-press at work on hastily-worded circulars. They offered a hundred dollars reward for any information of Dulcie or her abductors. This stimulated a number of the townspeople, who set off in various directions over hill and dale. By ten o'clock fifty people were out and Lucian was still uncertain what course to pursue. He had already decided that the clothing had been dropped to mislead and that the only clue lay in Dr. DeWitt. That worthy was apparently asleep in an arm-chair in the bar-room. Outside stood the township clerk and the pale shoemaker, chewing tobacco and chatting.

About noon Mrs. Buckman drove up in her carriage. She was entirely melted and thoroughly frightened. As the Colonel had taken a party of men up the eastern roads it fell upon Lucian Beardsley to go out to her with that lack of information which breeds the worst anxiety.

"I am afraid that he will kill her," murmured Mrs. Buckman's lips, "and no one be about. He may kill her this time, you know."

"She may die, Mrs. Buckman, die of neglect

or inhuman treatment, but not through him," said Lucian slowly, "for he is here and he never will escape me now to go to her. Glen Farm and all the cabins have been searched and they will be searched again. She is not there, I feel sure."

Mrs. Buckman clasped her hands together.

"I can only pray for her every moment. Don't you lose sight of him and you will get her, I am sure. Poor, poor Dulcie, poor martyr!"

At noon Dr. DeWitt rose, mounted his horse and started out of the town. At a little distance behind him pounded the shoemaker and the tall clerk, both on good horses. The doctor kept on toward Glen Farm, glancing back now and again.

"Are you all following me?" he asked, waiting for them to come up. "Because if you are, clear out!"

The men made no response of any kind and the doctor rode on, entering the farm. On pounded the horses behind him.

"You're trespassing. Get out! This is my place, d'ye hear?"

But the men paid no attention to him and, when he entered the house, stood, one at each entrance door, for a half hour.

"I'm going back to town, fools!" he shrieked, coming out. "I'll have the law on ye yet, see if I don't."

The Lexington men had arrived on the train and were busy with Lucian and the Colonel, who had returned without any clue. The handbills would be well over the county by night. The Lexington men thought it best that Dr. DeWitt should think himself free from any watch. This was done and his suspicions were somewhat lulled by the absence of the townsmen he dreaded. Graham was nowhere about, a circumstance that gave Lucian much uneasiness and conjecture.

About four o'clock Peter Manifold drove up to the hotel with Kitty in tears, Aunt Reba, and Eustace. The first ray of comfort Lucian Beardsley and the Colonel had during the dreadful day was when the flushed and tear-stained little wife rushed into their conference.

"Isn't it awful? But I shouldn't wonder if I could tell you all just exactly where that bad man took Dulcie and hid her!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A WOMAN'S NAY DOTH STAND FOR NAUGHT

IT'S no place for you to go."
"But I'm going, Peter, if I die. If she is not there, it won't hurt me. If she is there, she'll want to see a friendly woman's face mighty bad."

The two stood before the round table in the big parlour where a consultation of Dulcie's friends was in progress. Peter's usually gentle face was quite distorted with anger.

"You stay right here and take care of the baby. We can hunt up that hole by ourselves, I say."

"And make a fine mess of it!" retorted Kitty. "That poor yellow girl used to be as smart as any of you. I know her."

Kitty May was on the verge of indignant tears but stuck to her guns.

"Well, I wouldn't tell it if I was you!"

"She came right off the Le May place, she did. Her mammy was my mammy if you will have it. And she is only about two years older than me if she has got seven children. That's why I just do hate Dr. DeWitt, I do!" she breathed vehemently, her eyes like stars with anger.

Peter subsided and Lucian clapped his hands softly.

"O, Mistress Kitty May, you are a genius, you are!"

Kitty May coloured and softened at once, with a glance like victory at Peter.

"What would be your plan?" went on Lucian deferentially.

"We all will go out there and I will go in first and if Dulcie is there I will get her."

"O no, no!" broke from all the men.

"Yes, I will," announced the little soldier, "and I can find out more in ten minutes than you can in a whole year. I know Della. She loves me better than anything yet. There won't be any trouble. I can manage her first-rate."

"It's too risky," returned Lucian, but this time Peter put in.

"Kitty May is safe if that yellow woman is her foster-sister. I know nigger ways even better'n you do, Mr. Beardsley, bein' brought up that way and no othah. You all see that I never

knew Kitty May was her breast-sister or I'd nevah made such a fuss."

"It isn't such a big risk," declared the Colonel, "if Kitty May has got the pluck to carry it through. It may save some shooting and we don't care to be too free with weapons on this errand. Let's try to do things peaceful if we can."

"But we'll take our guns," observed Beamer Van Wye, "for a nigger hasn't got the proper respect nowadays for a white man without a gun. We'll take our guns and be on the safe side."

The plan agreed upon was that the party should at once separate as if going home. Peter and Kitty May were to turn off at a cross lane and make for Ethelbert Sugg's house, which was about four miles down the river and it was not far across to the cabin. Sugg proposed to cross the stream with horses and riders on a raft made to convey over hay and the farm crops, and he promised a short cut up the hollow.

Lucian, Colonel Buckman, Van Wye, and Summers, with John, the coloured man, as a guide, crossed the town bridge and rode to meet the raft party at a place agreed upon soon after dark. A plan to watch DeWitt was arranged with the detectives and Linas. The latter entered into it with much evident satisfaction as an

opportunity to display a peculiar humour. When the second party left the hotel Dr. DeWitt was still sleeping in the bar-room with his feet on a window-sill and his handkerchief over his face.

"Darned old catamount!" snapped Linas, "sleeps all day and prowls all night, he does."

In the stables two saddled horses waited and, at the hitching-post, stood that long-suffering mare of Dr. DeWitt's that every boy in Grafton and Middleport knew and pitied, watered and gave apples and hay to, as another dumb victim of his terrible habits. To-night Linas himself saw that she was watered and fed generously.

"She'll have work to do," he said grimly, "and he never spares her."

It was ten o'clock before the doctor awoke.

Then he stirred, sniffed and grunted ominously and brought his feet down with a thump. He gazed about with vague, glazed eyes, and, as his senses woke, suspiciously. The bar-room was more deserted than usual and he failed to find anything to growl about. After a drink or two he turned to Linas who was playing checkers with Henry Clay Taulbee, the biggest man, physically, in all Grafton.

"Row about my wife all over?" he asked

airily. "Don't see any policeman round sticking into other folks' business."

"Found her about five o'clock, I believe," returned Linas never looking up; "that's what we heard, Doc. I s'pose they took her right out to Colonel Buckman's place 'till she's able to tell jes' who broke into this hyah hotel o' mine."

"You're fooling me," cried the doctor, shaking and livid at once. "You are lying to me."

"You are mighty sure," sneered the lank Linas. "Say, Henry Clay, didn't you hear that Mis' DeWitt had been found?"

The big Taulbee took his pipe from his mouth.

"Ef Doc wants ter bet, I'll match 'im on anything he lays out that she's found."

"I'll bet the mare — no, I won't! Why should I pay any attention to you at all? She isn't found. Bah! what do I care anyhow? She's nothing to me."

Taulbee raised his big blue eyes inquiringly.

"What you makin' sech a 'tarnal fuss fer, then? She's found all right and you'll be in the soup-pot, won't ye?"

The doctor dashed into the darkness with much of the profanity for which he was noted.

Linas put his head out of the back door and whistled. Out of the darkness two riders went after the flying figure.

"He'll never stop 'til he's sure pop," said Linas, "and we all spoke the truth. She's good as found now."

The searchers met at the place appointed in the dewy summer night. The raft made a slow passage over by a wire fastened between trees. Kitty May hugged a bundle which she would not relinquish. Lucian's heart beat warm with gratitude as he surmised that it was clothing for the kidnapped wife.

They rode almost in silence over several meadows and not only Ethelbert but Kitty May seemed to know every step of the way. They struck the rocky creek bed a little farther on and proceeded another mile or more. Then Kitty stopped.

"Eth, you all can hear the river at the Big Bend. It is time to stop and tie up the horses."

John was left to keep an outlook, but within call.

"If Dr. DeWitt came over would he come up the creek bed?" whispered Lucian to Sugg.

The tall man shook his head.

"The river makes three turns and isn't a quarter of a mile distant. Beyond the river a half mile lies Glen Farm. He has a boat."

Presently Kitty May stopped them again. Across a rough bit of plowed ground shone a light.

"There's the house, and only one light. Give me fifteen minutes and if I don't come out, Peter, you steal up, will you?"

Peter growled something into her ear.

"O, I'm not afraid of Della at all. Yes, I've got the pistol in my pocket. I'll be all right."

She walked out into the open and struck boldly across the plowed ground. As she neared the cabin the door opened and a voice called out:

"Who dat out dar?"

"Mis' Kitty May, Della. Come out here. I must speak to you."

The door was slammed shut but in a moment was opened again.

"What you all heah foah at dark night, Mis' Kitty May?"

"Let me in and I'll tell you, Della. I come to save my foster-sister from big trouble."

The listeners heard a loud sobbing.

"I has lots o' trouble, Miss Kitty May, but I can't let you in."

Kitty May beat at the door.

"Let me in, Della. I came to save you more trouble. I'm your friend and I came to save you."

A shrill voice called out:

"Go 'way you! I'll tell my paw."

Kitty still beat at the door with her small hands.

"I'm out here and I will not go away, Della. Let me in, old mammy's girl."

A small crevice of light showed again.

"Let me in, Della, or send out that poor woman that's in there. The whole country is searching for her. I know she is there."

"Is that all yuh frien' dat war hyah onct, Mis' Kitty May? I war dead afeared o' dat."

"Of course it is. Of all the things the doctor has done, this one is the worst. Do you want to be put in prison, Della?"

The door opened but the distorted cripple was seen on the floor, pushing against it with all his strength.

"You hesh up! This is our house. I'll tell my paw. He'll shuah kill you," he shrieked.

Kitty May pushed him aside pitilessly.

She was in the rooms now, running and looking about in spite of the frightened children. Two of the rooms were as usual, but the third, opening out of the bedroom, was closed. Kitty's quick eyes at once saw that the door was not closed but had been recently nailed up.

"She's in there, Della," she cried, "and you will surely go to prison for it. You must get her

right out before those men come in and find her here. Don't you know who she is, Della? Don't you know?"

"She is de doctah's patient, and she's gone plumb mad. He's goin' try curin' her with fresh air out here, Mis' Kitty. She was brung here by her brother last night."

"A most wicked lie!" replied Kitty May solemnly. "She is Dr. DeWitt's wife. She don't want to live with him any longer because she saw those poor children. He stole her away last night and he sent her here."

With a wild yell, too much like that of a wounded animal, poor Della sprang out of the door into the darkness. Ere the anxious party in the bushes had time to reach the house the woman dashed into the kitchen with a great axe and began chopping at the closed door with mighty strokes. A furious strength possessed her and three or four blows broke through the planks. On the floor within lay Dulcie DeWitt, barefooted, and clad only in an old gown belonging to the negress. She crouched low in an agony of terror. With the last stroke of the axe and one mighty kick the door fell and Lucian Beardsley dashed in and raised up the shrinking figure of his kinswoman.

"Is she alive?" came many anxious voices. "Is she all right?"

"Give her to me, Mr. Beardsley," said Kitty May in her sharpest voice, "and do get her some water. Well, Della, you see I was right. You always would believe everything that wicked, wicked man said to you."

There was a sudden yell of delight from the cripple:

"There's my paw!"

Dr. DeWitt stood in the doorway, his face livid and distorted with fury.

"A nice set of people, you all, to come after another man's wife. I'll have it out of you yet. And who broke in that door? This is my house and my land."

But the octoroon sprang forward.

"This hyah's my house," she said sullenly. "Ye onct gib me papers and I broked down my own door, d'ye heah? I can do it if I want ter do it, d'ye heah? I'm not yuh wife, am I?"

"I'll give you a taste of this whip," cried the man furiously, "you see if I don't."

A half dozen pistols were out in a second but heavy hands fell on the doctor's shoulders from behind.

"You led us a fine chase, didn't you?" said one of the Lexington men coolly, "but your neighbours also have boats, doctor."

"We will take him back to Grafton with us," said the other man; "if he resists we can

clap him in jail for breach of peace, that's all."

Kitty May, sobbing for very relief, was wrapping a cloak around Dulcie and tying on her shoes. Della crept over the floor and tried to look up into her eyes.

"I did dat all foah you, Mis' Kitty May honest to God. He'll kill me yet, but I did it foah you. He said she war plumb mad, 'deed he did."

"Never do anything like it again," said Kitty May earnestly, "or you'll surely go to prison for it. If you do, don't come to me. Old mammy wasn't your kind. She was good as gold, honest and true."

They left Della crouched on the floor, the frightened children wailing. Lucian Beardsley and the Colonel supported Dulcie, Van Wye and Summers followed. Kitty May was almost hysterical and wanted to talk to her husband and Ethelbert Sugg at the same time.

John appeared in answer to his master's whistle. He had the big chestnut in lead.

"Wait," said Lucian in his assertive way, "wait, John."

He sprang upon the chestnut and held out his arms.

"Up with her, Colonel," he said, "up with my cousin. After to-night I stand back for no man."

They lifted her without any protest. He set her before him without a look at the others.

"Go on!" he said quietly, "I will keep with you as you walk."

He had her within his arm under the dark boughs. Her head fell onto his shoulder with her woe and weakness. Only once he heard her murmur something under her breath.

"Yes? what is it? Do you want anything?"

But she only repeated fearfully, wonderingly:
"For the wages of sin is death."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CAPTIVE TO HIS HONEYED WORDS

THEN began to go up and down the county as the summer passed many strange rumours as to the state of affairs at Broad Acres. The even tenor of the Buckman marital compact was in some way disturbed. The horseman absented himself much from home, he smoked furiously and rode hard. His wife was more erect, dignified and saintly-appearing than ever. The negroes whispered with regret how the "ole Kunnel" slept in the spare room and that "Mis' Sudie's temper" was a torment and a caution.

The trouble, sad to say, was about Dulcie. It arose from the fact that her kinsman carried her from the cabin of the negress straight to the house, Paradise; that there he gave her into the care of John's wife and that he and Beamer Van Wye patrolled the grounds all night. In the

morning he moved out his personal possessions and left Dulcie actual mistress of the place with Summers and John as a guard. He went to Lexington to consult a great lawyer, one whose name had been known in the halls of Congress for two generations. Acting on his advice, Lucian sent down an extra man and at once pushed on to Richmond. At home there and by the magic of his wealth, he finally secured the widow of a Confederate general to chaperone Dulcie and he reached Grafton with her in ten days' time.

Mrs. General Head did not come unwillingly or ignorantly. She knew exactly what was expected of her when she placed a large check to her credit in a Richmond bank. She came prepared to champion Dulcie DeWitt and to stand between her and the good folk of the county. In her young days she had been a great belle and still had much more spirit than her relatives liked. Lucian gravely assured her that her spirit would be worth money to her if she could use it in the right way. Mrs. Head — known generally as "Mrs. General" — assured him that she snuffed the battle from afar. Always elegantly gowned and impressive, she at once packed up seven trunks, and with her own maid was ready to return to Grafton with Lucian. She fully understood that she was to take up Dulcie's cause, and that with a vengeance.

The ten days of Lucian's absence passed uneventfully at Paradise. For three or four of them Dulcie was too prostrated even to notice the unremitting attentions of her new household. Lucian wrote her from Lexington asking her to remain in the house quietly and to allow Summers to manage everything. He also wrote her that he would return to protect her and bring a woman friend with him. Mrs. DeWitt was too horribly shaken by her latest experience even to reason. She could not read the books and she did not care to look at the boxes of sweets Lucian sent her by mail. She not only had Milly to sleep at night on a mattress at the foot of her bed, but Summers must be on a cot in the hallway. She trembled at every sound.

In the meantime the county was in a ferment. Dulcie DeWitt had gone to live in her cousin's house, a cousin so far removed that no one could grade the relationship, still a cousin. Dr. DeWitt went free. A man cannot be held for kidnapping his own wife. He laughed and boasted and declared that Dulcie went away with him willingly — that if Lucian Beardsley and that set would not interfere Dulcie would at once return to Glen Farm. He intimated in strong, choice and peculiar language that he could and would now make it particularly red hot for her if she put in a petition for divorce.

Mrs. Buckman was ready, on that night of Dulcie's rescue, to receive her and take her at once to Broad Acres. She waited, weary, heart-sick and anxious on the upper porch of the little hotel until, with no small amount of noise, the rescue party rode into the village and she saw Lucian Beardsley riding ahead with Dulcie in his arms, Kitty May at his side. Her good resolutions died within her at the sight. Had she spoken then Dulcie would never have gone to Paradise, but, during those hesitating moments in front of the hotel, Lucian Beardsley understood and resented, with the fiercest of resolutions, Mrs. Buckman's feelings.

"My poor girl! Well, mercy for mercy, fight for fight. She must go to Paradise."

Then he rode on with his burden.

An hour later Colonel Buckman returned to the hotel with Lucian Beardsley and Beamer Van Wye. His wife was bonneted and in wait. It was long after midnight. The Colonel called up the carriage and roused the sleepy men. He put his wife into it and stood with his foot upon the step.

"You will be perfectly safe going home alone," he said, "and there is too much for me to do here to go out with you."

"What are you going to do?" she cried with trembling hands. "What can be done?"

"What is done, we three men, Kitty May and

Peter Manifold will do," he said meaningly, "and I will come home as soon as I can to look after Favorite. She was a very sick mare yesterday."

Kitty May stayed loyally at Paradise with Dulcie, but Eustace's continued fretfulness next morning developed into a case of measles and the parents were forced to hurry off home with him. He was a much sicker child than they ever let Dulcie know, and this illness kept Kitty May away during Lucian's entire absence.

Colonel Buckman's announcement to his wife that Lucian Beardsley had installed Dulcie at Paradise was received with a burst of tears. He watched her very grimly, puffing at his pipe.

"It is the end, the very end!" she sobbed, "and that is what it has actually come to, after all Dulcie has been taught and told."

"Where else could she go?" queried the Colonel. "You never asked her here. You made a fool of me. I had been urging it, and you were dumb. Where could she go to be safe from that scoundrel?"

"She will really have to marry him — I mean Mr. Beardsley.

The Colonel grunted, but merely puffed away.

"I just cannot give my support to anything about that divorce," said Mrs. Buckman in a much firmer voice. "I am setting myself up

against all of you, but the day will come when Dulcie will know that I am exactly right. And I will stand against you all if it kills me. You may rescue her body, Colonel, but you all are going to kill her immortal soul."

The Colonel made no reply. He was not in a good humour to discuss souls. His mare was dead and the woman he regarded almost as a daughter was in terrible sorrow. He was bitterly hurt at his own impotence in the matter, and it was his wife's "notions" that had placed him in such a false position. So the rift widened.

He rode every day to see "his girl," as he fondly called her. He would tiptoe into the room and sit by her bedside. Her tears wet his stubby red hand as she held it to her cheek. Seeing her misery, his heart grew harder toward the cruel world and his wife.

Even Beamer Van Wye was somewhat surprised at the interest Dulcie's residence at Paradise excited. Whether it was sympathy or curiosity, many a carriage drove up the rose-bordered avenue to make inquiries during the fortnight and to leave cards.

There were frequent consultations between the Colonel and the lawyer. They sat on the grass plot in front of the frame office of the latter, every afternoon. The ground was quite bare when their feet shuffled to and fro. One day

there came a long letter from Lucian that pleased both men immensely. They solemnly adjourned to the most hospitable shelter of Linas's bar-room and there shook hands over several glasses of mint julep. When the genial effects of these had accomplished their work, it was decided that it was only fair to Peter Manifold that he should know all about it and they mounted their horses for a long ride in the interests of friendship and a good piece of news.

Eustace was better, but such a tiny white wraith of himself that the men both gulped something down when they looked at him as he lay on his mother's lap in the gallery. There was the remnants of a dumb fear in Peter's mild eyes and of a dumb grief and passion in Kitty May's. The two had fought against great odds for the little child's life and were as yet hardly aware of their victory. Kitty May would yield the babe to no one. Aunt Reba crouched by the pillow on which he lay and gently fanned both mother and child.

The two rejoiced greatly at the news of Mrs. General Head's coming. Kitty's heart thrilled so that it lifted away the lingering dread and she was once more able to smile and be hopeful. It was a relief to hear of the outside world, of the strong, protecting arm Lucian was throwing around Dulcie. Kitty May smiled and the flower-

like bloom of her charming, piquant face somewhat returned.

"Law, I'm so glad to hear of it! Mrs. General Head! That is a right big name, isn't it, Peter? Dulcie will be so swell she will not look at we all any moah. You all will never know how I wanted to be with Dulcie, but Eustace here — well, Colonel, Eustace has been pretty sick."

Her voice broke a little, then went on bravely:

"We all will have to take the next boat to Cincinnati foah good clothes to wear. We take the Richmond papers — Peter's pa took them before the wah — and I do read all the big society news. I've seen Mrs. General Head's name over a hundred times, and such fine dresses as she always has! Peter, just hand me a dozen or so papers off that Richmond pile. I will find you something about her, see if I don't."

Peter, the gladness of great relief in his eyes, went obediently. Kitty May caressed Eustace's fingers as she rattled on gaily:

"I'm with you all, heart and soul. I do want Dulcie to keep up heart. Some one's got to stand by her or she'll break up. She's got a terrible trouble and she's so alone. Every one must consider that."

"I'm sure," she rattled on, "that if Nancy was here she would make it up with Dulcie, now she's in such trouble. So I says to Peter, 'You

married cousinship in marrying Nance, and I'll take it up.' We're Dulcie's cousins too, and we're going to stand by her ef she goes to court. And my pa, John May, will come with us. Pa isn't counted on by some as right in the county bluebloods, but he's shorely known as a square man. Won't we all make up a party," she laughed out, "all of us in our best clothes and Mrs. General Head in the best clothes of all?"

Beamer Van Wye drew his chair near to her and bent over Eustace tenderly.

"Kitty May," he said softly, "I never was married and never had any daughters, but I wonder if I couldn't adopt you and Eustace some."

Kitty May regarded him with most appreciative eyes.

"I don't know what pa would say. He's awful proud of me. But you're one of the few I wouldn't mind having for Eustace's grandpa, you and the Colonel. I feel like you all sort o' belonged. Only don't you all coax Peter into too many juleps. I do have to lecture at him so after them, you know. I 'most wish I could scare him with Nance's rising about it."

Peter came in with the papers and gently deposited them on a chair by his wife.

"Do you want to hold Eustace just a little minute, Mammy Reba?" said Kitty May, beaming down on the black woman. "I know you are

dying to do it. See, he's looking at you. Take him very careful, Mammy. There, he's smiling just a little, my precious little life! And now — let's see —”

Kitty turned over the papers and finally waved one in triumph.

“Here it is! Want to hear it? Mrs. General Head at the Jefferson Nixons's ball. I knew I had it. Now you all do listen. ‘Mrs. General Head chaperoned several young girls from Baltimore and the east coast, among them the Misses De Jong, Leadau and Mason. Mrs. Head was elegant in a décolleté black gown of Chantilly net with very open jet Empire cements extremely becoming to her style. In the scarf drapery of the bodice were tied small bouquets of roses. Diamonds completed this very elegant costume.’”

An impressive silence followed. The Colonel was thinking of tawny-haired Dulcie in her simple black gown, Beamer Van Wye of the strange freak of Fate that was bringing Mrs. General Head to Grafton. But, somehow, all were unexpectedly comforted and the future looked much brighter.

One summer day Lucian's telegram from Lexington came, ordering dinner for a party of four and saying that he had Mrs. Head with him and that he wanted Beamer Van Wye to dine at Paradise. At five o'clock the arrivals came up the

avenue in the trap and Dulcie, very wan and trembling, stood alone in the hall and watched the party alight.

What had she to do with these fine people? With Mrs. General so splendid in feathers, laces and silk? With Lucian in his light clothing and Panama hat? With even Beamer Van Wye in his threadbare garb but with his distinguished air? These were people of a world wholly apart from her and her woes. She looked down at her own shabby gown, black and of no particular cut. She fled away, but Lucian was in at the doors, seeking her at once.

"Dulcie, my cousin, here is my friend, Mrs. Head, come to keep you company."

He felt all her shrinking, her hesitancy. But there was in it something youthful as well as pathetic. His enthusiasm lent her a little courage, and when he led her out to the terrace she had somewhat recovered. Mrs. Head had generously endeavoured to reconcile Lucian's many conflicting statements about Dulcie. She flattered herself that she understood men, but when the prince led out this shabby but very fair creature in distress, she drew her breath a little sharply. This was indeed a real Kentucky princess, and O! forlorn and really lovely enough to be forgiven all the trouble she was causing everybody.

"I may come in, may I not?" Mrs. General said

brightly, "for this Paradise of yours is so beautiful I can hardly believe I am to stay here a while. How lucky you are to have such a home, my dear."

Dulcie's head went up.

"My cousin only lent it to me. It is all his taste. And because you are his friend, I am glad to have you come."

"Well said!" thought Lucian. "She will do — with some new clothes, and O! if Mrs. General can but persuade her into those things she bought for her in Richmond."

But for several days it was a dangerous subject. Dulcie grew painfully red if new gowns were proposed to her, and shook her head.

It was then that the real trouble at Broad Acres arose. Lucian buttonholed the Colonel on the public square and took him to Paradise to call and to lunch. Straightway he fell a victim to Mrs. General's hospitable wiles, as had Beamer Van Wye. He waxed even more paternal towards Dulcie as he drank champagne and told her that she must obey her kind friends in every way and be thankful to Providence that had raised them up for her.

Lucian grimaced a little, but Mrs. General, in a private tête-à-tête with him on the rose-bordered terrace, gave him her opinion of Dulcie's great charm and her stubbornness as to gowns. Gowns and chiffon were absolutely necessary to

happiness in Mrs. General's mind. They would be such a consolation to Dulcie, and so becoming. Dulcie must show the world what she really was. The inevitable was coming. The divorce petition was preparing and, in the fall, Dulcie must go into court a lovely, radiant woman and show the whole county what a real ornament to Kentucky society Dr. DeWitt had been hiding away and abusing so scandalously.

The Colonel was quite convinced that nothing could avert the divorce. He was glad to be swept away by the eloquence of an elegant, perfumed lady of fashion who also amused and entertained him. Unwisely he went home and in his exhilaration declared, not only his intention of standing by Dulcie in October, but rather too openly expressed his admiration for Mrs. General. Such a thing had never happened before. Mrs. Buckman was indignant and she expressed it, whereupon the Colonel gave vent to his feelings in some memorable words.

"Sudie, you're an angel and a model of goodness, but you do not know anything of modern society."

Mrs. Buckman retaliated by declaring that she would never call on Mrs. General or on Dulcie while she was at Paradise. She said they did not belong there. Her husband coolly retorted that, if he had had his way, Dulcie would still be with

them and that he should certainly visit her and console her all he could. He put on his best white duck suit the next afternoon and went to dinner. Mrs. Buckman spent a sorrowful and prayerful night and then determined to extend the olive branch of peace. Accordingly, she also put on her best array and suddenly swooped down upon the two women.

Never in its palmiest days had Paradise been so beautiful. It was gay with awnings, ornamented with palms and ferns and roses in great pots and green tubs as well as blooming in the garden. There were bamboo couches and chairs, swinging divans with dozens of silken cushions, straw mats and rugs in gayest colors about the terrace. An electric fan kept up a delightful whir, and, in the subdued light on the eastern terrace, sat Mrs. General in a white lace gown that left little to be imagined as to a pair of plump shoulders and arms.

"Every day as old as I am," thought Mrs. Buckman, "and dressed like that! Um-m-m!"

No wonder her really warm heart trembled for Dulcie. Dulcie had been so carefully reared, and lived so quietly, that Mrs. Buckman's face burned resentfully. She looked about for "the child" as she thought of her, the child she had sheltered and nursed to return to misery because misery was her duty.

But Dulcie was not easily carried away. She came in from the rose-bushes a few moments after. It was very warm, but the only concession Dulcie had made to the weather was in a thin white waist with a bit of lace at the throat. She was unfeignedly glad to see "Aunt Sudie" and fairly clung to her. Mrs. General really liked and admired Dulcie, and it gave her a pang of jealousy to see how she held to this faded woman who had a superior air although she wore clothes that Mrs. General knew would be pronounced "dowdy" by her maid.

But Mrs. Buckman felt at once the subtle changes in Dulcie, the little new graces and mannerisms caught up by constant intercourse with a more conventional society. She saw the rounding cheek, the youth reviving in the clear eyes. They had stripped Care from "the child," were shielding her, caring for her. For what future? Mrs. Buckman shuddered at her fears.

In her new anxieties Mrs. Buckman lost sight of any olive branch intention. She had patience through that night's supper, but, as soon as the Colonel lit his pipe on the portico, she calmly told him that she had been to see "that painted Jezebel."

"That what?" exclaimed the Colonel, swallowing smoke and choking.

"Mrs. Head — that painted woman. I went

to see what she was like. You all are sending Dulcie straight to perdition. She is much changed already. But that woman! What do you go there for, Colonel?"

"For the same reason everybody else goes," retorted the Colonel, "and I do like your elegant sentiments. What are we all coming to? I told you that I was going to stand by Dulcie and see her free since she wants to be free."

"What then?" asked his wife coolly. "What comes after? I suppose that Mrs. General will take her off to Richmond for men to make game of. Men never respect women who are divorced."

"I hope to God that Beardsley will marry her," spit out the Colonel. "That will be the best thing. I believe he means to do it."

"It is all arranged, I suppose," cried Mrs. Buckman bitterly; "off with one husband, on with another! That is the modern life and the modern society I don't know about, and, please my Heavenly Father, I don't want to know about. I can do nothing but pray for Dulcie, and for you, Colonel — yes, for you."

Whereupon she left him to brood over such angry thought that he sat on the portico until midnight and then softly betook himself to the down-stairs room to be spared angry tears and recriminations.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MOST LOVE'S MERE FOLLY

IT can be truly said of Dulcie that at this time her last state was worse than any other. In three months' time she had been swept from every mooring, carried away by a veritable whirlwind of Fate from all that was connected with her past. The misery of her life at Glen Farm had always modified by a great necessity for action. There she was forced to move about, to urge the negroes in house and field, to set her home aright day after day, to almost fight for life, to be occupied. Her sorrows had brought her genuine sympathy and given her many friends whose words and unspoken pity always nettled her but was yet something sincere. Now she was sailing on unknown seas. She slept in the morning until she chose to awake. John's wife or small niece was at hand to anticipate every want when she did rise. Then there was always Mrs. General Head to

meet and encounter. Mrs. General's one idea was keep Dulcie's mind from her troubles, but as yet to she had not found the way. Mrs. Buckman's visit and Dulcie's gladness at the sight of her was a revelation. She was not actually fulfilling her mission, and with Mrs. General the discovery of a troublesome fact usually meant the promptest action.

She ordered the trap after an unusually early breakfast the very next morning and set off alone into Grafton under a great white parasol. A resplendent being she was in lilac lawn and lace and golden necklaces. Lucian was sitting on the upper portico of the hotel. It must be confessed that he was distinctly bored at the moment and Mrs. General saw and understood. In a few moments he was riding beside her along the green country roads and was talking very earnestly to her with the parasol conveniently held between the front seat and the rear.

An hour later Lucian, alone, entered the gates of Paradise and Mrs. General, escorted by Beamer Van Wye, rode away to visit a small waterfall to which she proposed to take a picnic party.

The terrace of Paradise, inviting enough, was wholly deserted as Lucian mounted the steps. For a second time in his life he had the feeling of homesickness come over him. He resented the loss of Paradise for himself, but what better

could he do for Dulcie than to give her what he wanted for himself? His quick glance saw certain improvements which could be done at once. His eye passed from the house and terrace to the lovely garden. It was Nature's own beauty spot. Lucian's resolution was taken as suddenly as most of his ideas materialized. Paradise must be his own, his home.

The screen door fell to softly behind him. The small reception-room, modernized under Mrs. General's skilful hand was empty, also the carefully shaded dining-room. He heard the chatter of the two black women on the rear porches. Dulcie must be alone in the rooms above. He hesitated a moment, then stepped slowly and softly up the carpeted stairway that wound around and came out in a large upper hall now furnished as a sitting-room. Half-way up, he heard a woman's sob. Alert, subtle, and with the softest, stealthiest expression, Lucian Beardsley crept forward. On a chintz-covered couch near the open glass-door leading out to the gallery lay Dulcie, her heart breaking in loneliness and sorrow. In an abandon of grief she had thrown herself on the couch when Mrs. General first drove away.

Without an instant's hesitation Lucian crept forward. Not a sound was heard although he seemed to breathe hard and quick. In his soul he

was cursing Fate that had given a woman such a woe. His whole being was tossed in a stormy wave of passion. Again he was held in the master grasp of a savagery that claimed this woman and let who dare come to interfere. He knelt beside her and, before she could see who it was, he gathered her to him with the low and pitiful cry:

“My poor little girl!”

There was a long silence. Outside a shrill bird sang and mocked. Lucian’s own eyes were wet because of those terrible sobs that beat against his very heart. There was a long silence and then Dulcie sat up with a white face.

“O, what have I done? What shall I do?”

He was very gentle with her, gentle as a mother to her weary child.

“Nothing, but I will do it all.”

Dulcie shuddered.

“I will die, if something does not end it. Every way is dark. Lucian, Lucian!”

She had never called him by his name before.

A great vein stood out on his forehead.

“Dulcie, answer me one question. Answer me solemnly, honestly. Do you wish to go back? Make your decision now, once for all.”

She stared at him blankly.

“You can go back. I will go away and never return, never annoy you, but I can not bear your

suffering. It must all end one way or the other, and at once. I am but a man, Dulcie, and have the full heart of a man, but I have had enough, enough. Do you wish to return to Glen Farm?"

A look of horror came into her eyes.

"I will die first."

"Then you must send in a divorce petition at once. Never mind anything else. Say 'yes' or 'no' as you wish."

"Can't I just — stay away, or go away?"

"No!" he thundered, "he is your husband. Think of that! It maddens me. You belong to him. How do you suppose I feel when I think of it? You can play with facts no longer. Either do that or I must go."

"I would be all alone then — it would be worse."

Her hair fell about her, her dress was disordered. He led her to the door of her room.

"Come out to me a little later," he said, his voice shaking. "I surprised you. Forgive me. Come out in a quarter of an hour when you have braided your hair."

But it was much longer ere Dulcie came out to him. There was a trembling light in her eyes and they avoided his gaze.

"What do you wish me to do, cousin?" she asked quite quietly. "I will do as you think best. Remember how silly I am. Why — why — with

a trembling in her voice, "I am so afraid of Mrs. General even."

He took her hand and led her to a seat.

"But not of me?"

"Ah, no."

"Because — some day — I will tell you — that you must not be afraid of me. I am trying now to think what is best for you. You will do as your friends wish?"

"O yes — it seems that there is no other way."

"Then you will get that petition at once, and I want you to go away with Mrs. General and to think of other things. Later we will have visitors — you must look well. Mrs. General solemnly assures me that new gowns are the best distractions a woman can have. Please absorb yourself in gowns. I also wish you could like Mrs. General. She will guard you and I can trust her. Do have some spirit and hold up your head. You are innocent of any wrong, Dulcie."

She flushed rosy red now.

"Will you ever be a woman? One would think you a child and you are surely twenty-six or twenty-seven. There, do not look so sorrowful. Come here to me."

She rose and they walked to the window. He still held her hand.

"Do you trust me? Do you believe in my great desire to make you happier?"

She raised her eyes to him suddenly. They blazed with reproach.

"Who have I but you? The dear old Colonel — but he is so hampered. Aunt Sudie" — but her voice broke.

"Hear me, Dulcie. Only wait. Maybe some day you will say that your old world is well lost."

The trap with the lawyer and Mrs. General drove up an hour later. Lucian calmly handed Beamer Van Wye a paper as he sank into a chair and motioned John for some liquid refreshment. The older man read with a placid face but curious eyes. He then passed it with a courtly bow to Mrs. General.

"I have ordered luncheon," observed Lucian. "My cousin will be here in a moment. And I must see Summers about those horses."

Then he hurried away.

Mrs. General closed the white parasol and smiled as she bent over the bamboo table on which the paper lay.

"Well," observed the lawyer, "that was a prompt piece of work, wasn't it?"

Mrs. General smiled sweetly.

"If you and I were fifteen and twelve, my dear Mr. Van Wye, we would probably say that things looked as if two friends of ours had kissed and made up."

"Humph!" replied Beamer Van Wye, "and I

should retort that there is also truth in an old proverb about promises and pie crust. She vowed she never would do it, you know, and that not so very long ago. As far as I am concerned, I see nothing else for her, although, as a matter of principle, my dear Mrs. General, I am unalterably opposed to divorces."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LORD, WE KNOW WHAT WE ARE BUT NOT WHAT
WE MAY BE

MRS. BUCKMAN sat alone on the wide portico at Broad Acres. She was pale and her lips were set more firmly than ever. She was at her lace work, one of the pastimes she loved, but to-day she did not make much progress. Often the needle was still, the pattern lay in her lap. She looked down the avenue, waiting miserably on events, but as unrelenting toward them as a cowed monk.

The Colonel had put on his "court day suit" without explanation and gone to Middletown that morning. He had not come to her to fix his collar or tie, and this augured the worst. For the first time in his life he had also failed to ask her for a list of household needs, but mounted into the buggy with only a farewell wave of the hand. Mrs. Buckman did not doubt but the negroes knew all about their master's errand. They gen-

erally knew all the county affairs and long before the dwellers in the large houses. She knew of the stealthy figures that slipped from farm to farm at night, tapping at windows, whispering through half-opened doors, lazy at everything else but tireless at carrying bits of news which would make others gape and cry out. Probably the negroes knew what the Colonel's errand was, every one of them.

All day she sat alone, eating her luncheon in solitary state, taking the semblance of her afternoon nap, then making her careful toilet to sit upon the portico at three o'clock. At this hour visitors were apt to come, carriages full of women and children, sometimes young folks or a depot wagon of men driving up to see the Colonel's horses. To-day the place seemed deserted and Mrs. Buckman felt it strangely.

After a time a slow cart creaked up the avenue. It contained 'Nondas, one of the stablemen. He stopped below in spite of her frown.

"'Clar to Gawd, Mis' Sudie," he began, touch his old hat, "'clar to Gawd dat Mis' Dulcie done gone back to Glen Farm riding like mad."

Mrs. Buckman's reserve forsook her. She actually ran down the steps to him.

"Where did you see her, man?"

"Mekin' de turn, ha'r flyin', ridin' a black

hoss. I dunno, but she war gwine dar ter de farm, an' no mistake erbout dat."

Mrs. Buckman's soul was at once uplifted. A pink colour rushed into her face. Her lips moved and what she said was:

"And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

"Scriptur er not, she went right dar," declared 'Nondas; "I seen 'er. But de doctah he gwine ter town. Guess he knowed what's gwine on. Funny dem folks let Mis' Dulcie go obah dar all alone. Been so keerful ob her sence she war stoled erway dat time."

Mrs. Buckman returned to her chair in a tumult of feeling. She had mistaken the moral strength in Dulcie. It was there. She had gone back to martyrdom. And this woman who would not lift her hand to draw her away still murmured fond prayers for her safety.

An hour passed, a warm, drowsy hour. Then, between the sunshine and the greensward, riding like a young goddess on a thoroughbred mare, came the woman of Mrs. Buckman's thoughts. She wore her old black riding gown and her hat, and her gloves were white at the seams. On her breast was a great knot of freshly-plucked red roses.

Mrs. Buckman met her at the foot of the steps and gave a sharp call for a boy to take the horse.

Then she put her arm around Dulcie and led her up to the chairs.

"I'm so glad you came! You have been at the farm, haven't you? Are you going back? The doctor is away, I know."

Dulcie's eyes were wide open with a great amazement and distress at once.

"Aunt Sudie, Aunt Sudie!" she cried, "you surely cannot ask me to go back there after all you know. Or maybe you knew all that before. You can't ask me to go back now."

The passion of horror in her voice thrilled her hearer.

"I thought—I thought—" she stammered, confused and angry at herself for her mistaken ideas.

"Thought I had gone back?" cried Dulcie. "No, no, never! I will go to the creek and drown myself first. No, I came to say good-bye to you, Aunt Sudie. Indeed, I ran away to say good-bye to Glen Farm and you."

The older woman pressed her arm in anguish.

"To say good-bye?" she echoed miserably; "to say good-bye?"

Dulcie drew herself up with an effort.

"I ran away when Mrs. General had visitors from Lexington. I could not talk to them to-day. I took the new horse and came out here."

She breathed heavily for a moment.

"I wanted to see the graves, my father's and

the babies'. They are all weed-grown now. I plucked these roses there. They are like blood, so red this year. I said good-bye to those graves, but some day I will come back to them."

Mrs. Buckman nodded her head.

"I went to tell my father and tell them that I could have died there but that I could not live that way. They know now and they will not blame me. I am only human."

"What are you going to do?"

"I do not know — just yet. They are all very kind and do my thinking for me. There is no care, no worry, but it is strange — yet."

"Do you like it?" whispered Mrs. Buckman, "do you really like it?"

The woman she consulted looked from side to side helplessly.

"I am homesick all the time," she replied in a low tone, "homesick and heart-sick. Yet I could not go back. Something has changed, and to come back — that could never be."

Mrs. Buckman drew Dulcie by her sleeve to a seat.

"Dulcie, let us guide you and guard you. The Colonel will take you away and our good Bishop will find a place for you to stay until all these feelings have passed. Then, after a time, you will have more strength to do your duty here among your friends."

Dulcie looked up at her for a long time. Then she said, in a strange and scoffing voice:

"I believe you really think that I ought to go back to Dr. DeWitt as if nothing had happened. You've sent me back so many times."

Mrs. Buckman paled.

"I cannot see your duty any other way, Dulcie."

"Duty to others is not everything. Do I not have a duty to myself, Aunt Sudie? Am I to have no respect for myself? Am I to overlook the wrongs to others, to innocent and ignorant children who might be born if I do my duty? No, you are wrong, you are wrong! God gave me a body and a soul. If marriage made the doctor and me one, Sin has divorced us, and Sin not of my seeking. I will take my soul and go on alone."

Mrs. Buckman clasped Dulcie in her arms.

"I am afraid," she murmured, "afraid for you."

"Afraid of what? Afraid I have forgotten all I feel, think and know? Afraid I will forget that I am my father's daughter? Afraid that I will do wrong for position or money or ease? How little you know me, Aunt Sudie, how little you trust me!"

"Then why turn away from your old friends for these new and strange ones?"

"I think the others turned from me in most

cases," said Dulcie, "and these new ones from the outer world are not afraid to take the trouble to protect me. To the rest of you I am and have been a continued scandal and worry in the neighbourhood. It could only end in worse scandal and worry. Any way I look at it, life is dark and wrong. I try to choose the least wrongs now that I understand. Aunt Sudie, I grope like a child."

Her hearer's eyes were wet.

"The door will open. When the Lord shuts one door, he opens another."

"Then why," cried Dulcie, "why does he make the Christian people so hard on me and the others so kind?"

Mrs. Buckman stared.

"Dulcie, Dulcie, don't you see? Don't you know? Has your trouble taken your wits? You are a woman long grown, with much experience and trouble. Do you suppose Mr. Beardsley is doing all this out of mere kindness and from a mere desire to aid a very distant relative?"

Dulcie sat erect, slim and lovely. Little translucent lights played about the roots of her hair. In her large eyes was an expression like the light on a sword blade. Her lips were a scornful scarlet bow.

"Perhaps — you've always been good to me in a way — perhaps, Aunt Sudie, you will explain."

But Mrs. Buckman shrank away and parried the question.

"Is it reasonable to suppose that a man of the world like him will take so much trouble for mere kindness?"

"Don't you question me!" cried the young woman in a fury of anger, "but tell me right out now. What do you mean?"

"I believe," retorted Mrs. Buckman, "that he's been in love with you — in his way — since the day he struck the doctor for you."

Dulcie sat perfectly still for a moment, then she rallied and faced Mrs. Buckman.

"And I," she said coldly, "I believe his great heart spoke and told him how much I suffered and how alone and helpless I really was. I believe God raised him up for my cause. I believe there is a God for those who suffer long and patiently. I believe Lucian is true in his endeavours to make me happier, and that all he has said or done is in great kindness."

"Then you've gone blind," retorted the older woman. "We all see it plainly."

Dulcie rose and gathered up her skirt.

"You do me a very great honor then. Think of the women he has seen and will see. Only yesterday he had all the Woodruffs and the Wrights and the Harters out on a picnic jaunt. You know Sally Harter, how pretty she is. He said last night

that she was the handsomest girl he had ever seen. You ought to be ashamed, Aunt Sudie. I am old and worn and sorrowful and sad. A man doesn't feel anything like love for such a pitiful sort of creature. He is only sorry, only sorry."

Then suddenly she wheeled around.

"But I came to say good-bye. I know you are against it all. I came to say good-bye to my childhood, my wifehood, my children's graves and you all. It is all over, Aunt Sudie, stone dead, and we are going to bury it as decently as we can. I might as well tell that this morning Mr. Beard-sley, the Colonel and Mr. Van Wye went to Middletown with my petition for a divorce. So good-bye, Aunt Sudie, for I never will come to Broad Acres again unless you send for me. I just wanted to say good-bye to you — with all the other things of the old life."

Half-way down the avenue a galloping figure met her, drew rein and rode out slowly beside her. And, although Mrs. Buckman could not see very clearly for the blinding tears in her eyes, she felt quite sure that it was a tall and gallant figure with eager eyes and a mien that invited no interference.

That night Mrs. General insisted that Paradise must be illuminated. The lamps were all lit, Beamer Van Wye and the Colonel's horses were stabled until a late hour, the terrace resounded

with gay voices and laughter. Dulcie herself yielded to Lucian's persuasions to wear something besides a black gown. She had only an old, washed-out white one, but she wore the red roses on her breast. There was not a word said as to the events of the day, but Mrs. General's infectious spirits and unflagging entertainment made it almost a festival.

Lucian, handsome as a prince in his dinner dress, kept her company in her wit and repartee. He could have screamed at any time with a species of hysterical laughter. Since he had set out after Dulcie that afternoon he had been upset. The only fear of his life had then clutched at his heart. Had she gone back to Glen Farm and to that man? Dulcie had not known, but to Mrs. General he said, when she left them on the terrace:

"I thought she had gone back. I am completely unnerved."

Mrs. General merely replied:

"We must get her away in the morning. But your Kentucky women can keep one's hands full. I am amazed at her real daring and spirit."

"I am always amazed at her danger," said Lucian. "She never seemed to remember that Dr. DeWitt might have returned while she was there. I really feel that Providence took care of her."

Mrs. General Head laughed softly.

"Lucian, I never knew you serious before," she said, "and when do you think the letter will come from your brother Fordyce? I do really need reinforcements."

About eleven o'clock Lucian drew Dulcie out into the garden.

"It is moonlight," he said, "it is lovely moonlight, and there are lovelier roses. I want to say something to you before you go away."

She flitted before him, singularly elusive and aloof.

"Do not let us go very far," she soon said, "for you know I like to hear voices. Let us stop here."

This was a new mood.

"You will hear voices enough to-morrow. Now promise me to do all I ask of you."

"Hardly that," she replied after a little wait, "for we see life from such different standpoints, cousin. But I will try to please you of course."

"First, let Mrs. General provide you with a suitable wardrobe. You must make a different appearance. Next, will you write me a letter every other day? I shall be very lonely. I want you to stay away a month or two as we are to make some changes here. I have bought Paradise."

Her face flushed.

"Next, enjoy yourself. I believe that Mrs. General has a plan of campaign to one or two of the Northern lake resorts. No one will know you, so cast off all care. Let the past go, and look forward. You will need all the strength you can muster when you return. It is hard to tell what Dr. DeWitt will do with the aid of those scoundrels at Middletown.

Dulcie moved uneasily and then raised her eyes. He read a mute protest.

"What is it, Dulcie?"

"I do not want to go unless you think it best. I am always afraid of Mrs. General. She is kind, too kind. But I will go."

"It is much the best," said Lucian very gravely. "You will understand later on, and know Mrs. General better by the time you return. Please trust her and do obey her. Do not go off on any more impulsive jaunts like that one this afternoon. All will be right in the end."

Dulcie moved restlessly toward the house.

"You seem anxious to get in. We will return. Will you not say good-bye to me? Come here."

But this time she remained motionless.

"Come, little cousin."

At once Dulcie began to walk toward the house.

"Really, I must go in."

He caught up with her.

“Without any word for me? I never fancied you were cruel. Haven’t you a word for me?”

Her hands shook as she fingered the red roses.

“Dulcie!”

But she turned resolutely and flung the words back at him.

“I am not free — let me take my soul and go.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IN THE DARK BACKGROUND AND ABYSS OF TIME

BACK and forth as the dust flew on the white roads, as the corn grew tall and the summer waned, went the whirlwind of gossip from one end of the country to the other. Never had there been a more fruitful theme than the DeWitt trouble, and every day there seemed a new phase or development. It was now the repairs and changes at Paradise and the absence of Mrs. General Head and Dulcie, again some one in Middleport had seen some one else who knew of their stay in Chicago and at the Wisconsin lake resorts. Dulcie's wardrobe and beauty were sensationally enlarged upon and the news flew about how Mrs. General was bringing her forward in every society. All Grafton was interested in the magic of Lucian Beardsley's money. It was wild excitement to the people to watch the workmen from Cincinnati and Lexington and

Louisville, to see boxes and packages and barrels arrive by every train, to wonder at the cost of things and to admire or envy the owner. Lucian was busy, happily busy, and, in his improvements, he enjoyed the advice, suggestions and full approval of Colonel Buckman and the lawyer, Beamer Van Wye.

In these changes the real romance of Beamer Van Wye's life was somewhat disclosed. The former owner of Paradise had been the impoverished father of Jessie Le Duc, once his betrothed. His continued poverty and his defeat for the state legislature in bygone days induced the father to carry the girl abroad. Beamer was helpless because of the increasing infirmities of an aged father, and when he was at last free Jessie Le Duc had wedded a petty Italian noble, although to the last she had declared her love and preference for her American lover. In Paradise the dearest days of the lawyer's youth had been spent, his fondest hopes born; and there also had been the terrible tragedy of the parting. After hearing this story, Lucian ceased to invite the lawyer to view each little improvement and modification. He came, however, of his own accord, and begged his friend and benefactor not to mind him, for he knew now that it was all for the best, but the gardens were little disturbed and more on his account than on any other.

By the first of September Lucian Beardsley viewed with satisfaction a new Paradise. A cornice added much to the front of the house, and the terrace had a light balustrade and corner posts to which the awnings were hooked. To the left of the main building was a wire-screened summer dining-room overhanging the slope into the rose garden. To the right and the rear had been thrown out a long wing and a pillared piazza. The house was dazzling in a new coat of white paint, and there were green shutters at every window. The terrace was beautiful with potted plants such as Grafton had never seen, and on the steps, when the sun went down, were spread prayer rugs from Eastern looms.

The interior of the house was thrown into a suite of fine rooms, but the long wing was separated by sliding doors from the main building, and in this wing Lucian took up his abode as soon as possible, giving his entire time to the improvements. On the upper floor of this wing and of the old portion were arranged a half-dozen bed-rooms and bath-rooms for which an engine continually lifted water into a high tank. Three cottages had been constructed for the servants early in the summer.

On the fifteenth day of September, save for a few minor details, Paradise stood ready for its occupants. The Colonel and the lawyer dined

with Lucian in the evening. They came in while he was full of exhilaration and anxious to escort them over the whole place for perhaps the twentieth time. He was so full of the improvements that he did not notice their gravity. They dined in the outdoor room on the best that their host could offer, and later they sat upon the terrace with good cigars and wine beside them.

Suddenly he caught a piteous entreaty in the old Colonel's eyes and an expression that smote him like a weapon.

"What is it, Colonel?" he asked quietly.

The Colonel flushed and stammered, coughed and looked helplessly at the lawyer.

"Out with it," repeated Lucian. "I noticed that you were silent at the dinner table. Out with it!"

Beamer Van Wye cleared his throat.

"DeWitt," was all he said.

Lucian lit a cigar.

"He is going to file a cross petition."

"Well?"

"And is not content with gross neglect of duty as a cause."

"Mrs. DeWitt was too lenient in hers." he continued slowly.

Lucian set his teeth.

"Well, what has he done? We can amend our petition if need be."

"The mischief's done," breathed the Colonel hoarsely; "it's done — and well done."

Lucian felt as if cold steel had been driven into his very vitals.

"Well, tell it."

"He is going to apply for a divorce himself."

"And?"

"Has named you — as the cause."

Lucian jumped up and smote the table madly.

"Beamer! Colonel! the poor girl, the poor girl! Whose work is this?"

Beamer Van Wye laughed bitterly.

"It is that scoundrel Graham, Anson Graham. It is because you have money. You might have foreseen it."

"He must have his price. What can we do?"

"Stop it or fight it out."

"How can it be stopped?"

Beamer Van Wye shrugged his shoulders.

"As I tell you, he has his price. That is just why he let me know to-day. He will go to Middletown with his petition to-morrow unless he hears from me."

"The petition will not go to Middletown," said Lucian tersely.

The lawyer drummed on the table.

"It is a mere question of money," broke in the Colonel still more huskily, "but, Beardsley, for God's sake do pay it, do pay it. I cannot — just

now — and she cannot. She will be about penniless anyhow. I believe you are a man. On my knees — yes,” he sobbed, “on my knees I ask you to pay it. I think of her father — of my wife — of all of us — only pay for it.”

Lucian listened, with the lawyer's eyes on his drawn face. Presently he rang the bell on the table.

“The drag, John,” he said, “and the best team, the rugs and other heavy covers for a long ride. How far is it to this man's house, gentlemen?”

“Nine miles,” replied the lawyer; “he is between Grafton and Middletown.”

“Nine or ninety, we will see him. Excuse me until I get my check-book. Or perhaps it better be cash. What say you?”

“All will be one to Graham,” said the lawyer, “but shall we not plan out something first?”

Lucian Beardsley struck the table again with his fist.

“Plan!” he cried, “there is no plan needed. Either he sets his price, takes the money and tears up Dr. DeWitt's petition, or — or —” and he shook his head wildly.

“DeWitt may come in again.”

“DeWitt!” broke in the Colonel derisively. “He has probably forgotten he was ever advised by Graham to fight. He has no memory left. He is only a poor tool.”

"It looks mighty cowardly," said the Colonel.
"It looks —"

"Hush!" said Lucian Beardsley. "Look at this."

He took a cablegram from his pocket and threw it onto the table. It was in cipher, but the translation was written out below.

Beamer Van Wye opened it and read aloud:

"We will reach New York on the twenty-second and immediately start for Kentucky, Evelyn and myself, man, maid, baby and his nurse. Fordyce Beardsley."

"Which means," commented the Virginian, "that, on receipt of late letters, my good brother comes over at once to our kinswoman's rescue and he brings his wife. It means that Dulcie will have more supporters and that, the battle over, she can return to England with them if she will go."

"And then?" queried the Colonel anxiously.

"I shall go over. The future lies in Dulcie's hands. But you can see why — a thousand whys — this matter must go our way. Else — else it is to ruin everything and everybody."

They rode fast through the night, these three men, as they had once gone before, rode to gloss over a wrong done by another and that a woman might not know and suffer greater wrong. The one was a stout and red-faced horseman of no

particular presence and a great deal of obstinate goodness. Another was a man whose heart and ambition was dead because of the one woman he had loved and lost; the youngest was a man only now awaking to life's sternest aspect, and as determined as death. As in olden times knights went forth to rescue, so went these three moderns, no less pure of purpose. Far away Dulcie calmly slept. In the light amusement of her days the past seemed only a dreadful dream. Mrs. General had been wise. The young woman's repressed youth conquered. Change of scene, and new, cheerful faces had relieved Dulcie's mind from its strain. Once more she smiled and almost forgot her sorrows.

Sometimes, in his after life, Beamer Van Wye looked back upon the events of that night. He remembered the long ride, the loud baying of the hounds in Graham's house-lot, the spirited call for him, and even the spurt of a match as a lamp was lit in the room above the front porch. He remembered an anxious wait while Anson Graham rose, dressed and came out to them. The men were out of the drag and John drove down to the gate out of hearing.

"I am here in reply to your letter," said Van Wye coldly.

"I ruther expected you all," returned the drawling voice of Graham, "not so late though."

"We did not care to be seen coming any earlier," broke in Lucian haughtily. "Now proceed to business. I will not haggle with you. What's your price or DeWitt's price or both?"

"Come now, Mr. Beardsley."

"I'm not here to talk. Name the figure. That petition must not go in. I don't mind saying I'll kill both of you before it shall go in. Name your figure. If I don't like it and won't pay it, I'll say so and you can look out for yourself."

Graham shivered between his fear and his avarice.

"You're powerful quick. We all have got a mighty good case though, Mr. Beardsley, so you all must expect a good figure. DeWitt will go elsewhere with it unless I stop him, you see. He must be quieted down and made to feel real good or he'll not be satisfied. We will take a couple of thousand, Mr. Beardsley, and that hoss he's been wanting, the one you all bought, Kentucky Cupid, ain't it?"

Lucian laughed scornfully.

"You'll never get the horse, Graham, for he is out of my hands now and goes to England. Try again."

"Well, if we don't get the horse it's moah like a cool five thousand we want. DeWitt wants the horse."

Lucian repeated his dreadful laugh.

"How are you going to account for him or you having so much of my money? You've got a reputation for rascality now. Well, have you got that petition here? Get it out and let's close the bargain. No, I will not darken your door. Bring out a lamp and some paper. I have a fountain pen. We want a paper from you, duly signed and witnessed though, that DeWitt withdraws this petition because he got his share of five thousand dollars."

"What are you all going to do with that leetle paper?" said Graham uneasily.

"You'll see it if DeWitt ever comes up again in this matter, Graham," broke in Van Wye. "You are paid, like any other servant, to keep DeWitt from doing anything more. Mrs. DeWitt is to have her divorce and no defence is to be made. See? In short, you are now retained on our side and a nice slice of luck it is for you. It will pay off your mortgage, won't it?"

Graham growled ominously.

"Is it a bargain or not?" continued Van Wye. "We are not at all afraid, Graham, but we wish to spare the name of a poor woman whose suffering ought to appeal to the sympathy of every man. Her kinsfolk are willing to pay you for peace, that is all. Hurry up now!"

The paper was finally signed and the ride back was one of silence. Above them proceeded the

great panorama of the morning planets and stars, about them lay silent and shadowy farms and houses, woodland and hillslope. The Colonel dozed, his head on his chest, the lawyer was silent, and Lucian Beardsley respected their wishes. As he left the Grafton lawyer and the Colonel at his gate, the former put out a slim hand and shook his own.

“Beardsley to the rescue! Money and the modern knight. You have certainly done much for the heroine, and may you all live happy ever after!”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HERE IS MY JOURNEY'S END

ALL Grafton woke in a quiver of excitement one November day. Was not this the time set for the hearing of the DeWitt divorce case? Was not every one who could raise what Linas facetiously called "the price," going down on the morning train to Middletown to see what could be seen and to hear what could be heard? Had not Henry Swayne kept excitement at fever heat by intimating that "he and cousin Doc" might yet spring a sensation that would "raise hair"? Had not Dr. DeWitt himself, money-flushed and prowling wildly over the country by night, declared in divers and sundry places that he did not want the "little red-headed vixen" if she wanted to be free, then, fickle-minded, declaring the next time that he could knock the whole thing "into a cocked hat if he cared to tell some things

he knew." It is to be added that, at this juncture, Linas usually told the doctor to "hesh right up er git outen the bar-room" and that the doctor always subsided. In some way, equally mysterious, it came to be understood that the doctor had been pacified with money — really "sold out"; that he had also compromised on the Glen Farm matter and was going to Mexico or California or to Arizona or some far-off place to "set up again and make some money" with one of his Middleport cronies. Once or twice he rode furiously about Paradise at night and rumour soon credited the place with a night watchman, as it did with all things possible that money could buy. Paradise looked gay enough these days with the "swells" that came from England as well as from the East. There were English servants and innovations that made life at Grafton "one long tattling dream" according to Beamer Van Wye. The lawyer had somehow acquired several new coats and a hat that passed muster. He was the devoted intimate of Lucian Beardsley and amused Mrs. General Head beyond any possibility of *ennui*. Mrs. General had returned, triumphant, to welcome the English Beardsleys. She brought back a new Dulcie, at least one transformed in appearance. She had a figure, becoming clothing, and better health. Some timidity still remained as the result of her last and most

dreadful experience, but Mrs. General thought it not unbecoming and it certainly aided the youthfulness of her appearance.

On this autumn morning, when the brown fields were disclosing their bareness with the lifting of subtle mists, there dashed up to the ugly yellow railway station at Grafton a party whose coming was expected by a hundred open-eyed people. Two carriages there were, a goodly show among a half-dozen other substantial vehicles from outlying country places. From the high drag first descended the splendid Mrs. General Head, appropriately attired in subdued and elegant black, with a picture hat and a full boa of ostrich feathers that took ten years from her age. Next came down Lady Emily, that plain blonde noblewoman of old England, who had more of a maternal air toward the whole party than Mrs. General; and thirdly, the heroine of the occasion, a slim, tailor-made creature whose new appearance made her townspeople stare and wince. Was this "Mis' DeWitt, that poor leetle creetur" they had always known? O surely not, for this woman seemed young and fair, and how her hair shone and her eyes asked for kindness! Men swore a little and wondered why they had not done something for her long ago.

"Lord, but I've always loved her like thun-

der!" declared the Colonel that day; "her eyes always begged me for something."

"They beg others," suggested the Lexington lawyer, "and I calculate they ask the same thing of Beardsley. When it's over, when it's safely over, Van Wye, what is she going to do?"

"Mrs. General talks of New York and Newport and such places, and adds that, at least for a while, she must see society."

"On his money? O no, we can't let that go on, you and I just can't. We'll talk to her, Beamer."

"The fleshpots of Egypt do agree with her," observed the lawyer, watching blue smoke rings thoughtfully.

"She has got her feet in snares, my wife says, and she's 'most always right. I do hate to treat Beardsley badly. He will offer to marry her at once I suppose."

"No, he shall not."

The lawyer leaned over and whispered. The Colonel's face lit up.

"I'll go you," he said, "and she will back us up or I'm not one of her best and oldest friends."

As the group from Paradise waited on the platform the Manifold carriage drove bravely up. It had been "done up" for the occasion and shone in the sun with new paint and varnish. Peter was beyond criticism in a Prince Albert coat that made him look like a preacher, and a

tall silk hat that was at once the instant envy of every negro in Grafton. Kitty May also was in high feather. Her gown had come from Cincinnati, her hat from Chicago, her gloves from New York. This combination, the result of mail orders, was most gratifying to Kitty. Even Mrs. General Head put up her lorgnette and said to Dulcie:

"My love, will you please look at Mrs. Manifold?"

Dulcie did not only look at Mrs. Manifold, but she fled to her and was clasped in her arms.

"Darling Dulcie! You see we are all here and I want to introduce my pa, Mr. John May. You all know I said he would stand by you, Dulcie, tooth and nail. And here he is to do it!"

A very fat, good-natured gentleman with a right merry eye and a wheeze came up, followed by Mammy Reba and the ubiquitous Eustace. To every one's surprise he at once assumed such a sort of good-natured command over everybody and everything that it carried the day.

"Land o' me, it is hot for this time o' year! Mrs. DeWitt, since you are cousin Dulcie to my gal, I just will have to adopt you on the spot. I'm the purely disinterested party that will pilot you all right through the day if you all will accept my escort."

"Law, pa, you are the biggest beau yet!"

cried Kitty May in sheer delight. "You hang on to Pa, Dulcie D., and you will come out all right. Pa is a power."

Beamer Van Wye nudged Lucian with his elbow.

"Now what do you think of that?"

Dulcie had succumbed to Mr. May after one look into the kind, round face.

"No wonder Kitty May is such a dear," she said, a little tremulously.

"It runs in the family," chuckled the old gentleman, "so we will call it a bargain. Now here comes the train. I hear we are to have a special car — which is very nice and swell. Shall I give you my arm and just tuck Lady Em'ly on the other side? Don't you mind the crowd a bit, my dears. I can't be shoved off my feet easy, I tell you!"

It was a truly delectable sight to see Mr. John May proudly escort the ladies to the Pullman car. The Congressman and Mrs. General stared as they followed, Kitty May captured Mr. Fordyce Beardsley with a smile, and the Colonel, trailing along with the masculine element in the rear, declared he'd be damned if he had ever seen such infernal impudence in all his life.

"He's saved the day," declared the lawyer, "He always wins in a lawsuit — it's in him,

that's all. I never do go against him. He's had about twenty suits in his life and he's won out every time."

Later on the same party became the sole occupants of a small and dusty room in the old red brick court-house at Middletown. It was still warm enough for impudent flies to buzz noisily at the dirty windows and for the men to sigh and mop their faces. There was a row of wooden chairs along the wall and in these the ladies sat while the men stood up or walked about in an embarrassed, awkward uncertainty as to what they ought to do or to say. Even Mrs. General had no precedent, and she said so to Kitty May as they took chairs at the end of the line.

"I never was in a country court-house before this, or at a divorce trial."

"I suppose not," returned Kitty May sympathetically, "but it's just like having teeth pulled. It will soon be over. I feel just like I was at a funeral — not of a real relative, you all know, but of some one I had met, anyhow."

Mrs. General moved uneasily.

"I don't suppose that anything could go wrong."

"Law, no!" returned Kitty May, "the men have been watching things. But I can ask pa — he can find out."

She attacked her father, who was playing "Bo peep" with Eustace.

"Could anything go wrong, pa?"

He gave her a startled glance.

"God bless me, I hope not! I believe I better go out and see how the land lays, hadn't I?" and he hurried out.

In the meantime, in the corridor just without the door, Peter Manifold, Colonel Buckman and the lawyer were smoking and kicking at the baseboards under a window. Their expressions were varied and not reassuring. Beamer Van Wye had seen Anson Graham below stairs and wondered if the man had any errand up his sleeve that would mean a defence on the part of Doctor DeWitt. It put him in a cold sweat.

"You never can tell just what a scoundrel will do," the lawyer commented wisely.

From the court-room beyond there came a monotonous hum of voices. Another case was on, and presently loud sounds of weeping were heard. John May thrust his head in at the door.

"Pah!" he said, and withdrew hastily. There followed a frowsy country woman, who had, for good reasons, been severed from a home she had wantonly outraged for years. Wailing, she passed along.

"Hardin Hovey's got his freedom," observed Van Wye, "and we come next."

He brushed his hair back from his brow and passed into the court-room with an easy stride.

In the meantime Dulcie sat stupidly in her wooden chair against the wall. Her heart beat quickly and her pulses fluttered. She looked, dumb and unseeing, at the objects and at people about her. She could not believe or understand that here was the hour of positive disruption, here the moment that unloosed those bonds and obligations she had taken on herself eight years before. There appeared before her, as in a picture, the moment of her marriage. She saw herself in her white frock, her white-plumed hat, entering the Grafton church on her father's arm. She heard the low, sweet music that played "Call Me Thine Own." She saw the doctor, tall and well groomed, under the chancel light, waiting. She heard herself say "I will," and then something clutched her. It was Kitty May, a little pale and with very pitiful, loving eyes.

"Get ready, dear. Pa says the case is called. Now hold right up."

The women crowded about, awe-filled. Lady Emily took one of Dulcie's gloved hands.

Lucian and Fordyce Beardsley came in together. They glanced at the group and stood over in a corner helplessly. Mrs. General Head joined the women, and the Congressman, after

a word or two, went out into the court-room to watch the proceedings.

Still the flies buzzed on the dirty panes, still every one waited. It was hideously like expecting a corpse to be brought into a room of mourners. The Colonel put in his head and motioned to the twins. They went out after him. In five minutes Kitty May was discovered sobbing a little.

"I wish some one would talk," she gasped out.

Dulcie pulled her head over on her own shoulder.

"Don't you cry! I'm not realizing it, Kitty May."

"It isn't a funeral," stated Mrs. General, "and we are all making it worse. Let us be more cheerful. It cannot last long. I think you are wise not to try to realize it, Dulcie dear, so as to keep up. You are in the right."

"I couldn't help thinking about, 'let no man put asunder,'" said Dulcie simply.

Kitty May jumped as if shot.

"Yes, but there is a front to that. 'Whom God hath joined.' He never joined you two. It was just a mistake. If God had joined you two I'd feel different; but God never does join goodness to deceit nor right to meanness, and He says in the Bible to 'eschew evil.' You are eschewing evil — that's all. Don't you worry!"

At that moment the Colonel, very red in the face, and the almost breathless Mr. John May, came in hastily.

"Dulcie!"

"Yes, you are wanted now, my dear," puffed Mr. May, "and we'll take you in all right. There's nothing to worry over. Everything is going on beautifully, beautifully."

But when Dulcie was fairly out of the room all the women wept, even Mrs. General, who was furious at herself since she knew it was the one thing fatal to her personal appearance.

Dulcie took Mr. May's arm and the Colonel's hand. So supported, she seemed to float into vast and unreal spaces. The large court-room was as dirty and gloomy as possible. There was a jumble of spectators back of a rail, a tired-looking old man sitting up at a high bench or desk. She took a solitary seat in front and heard Mr. May's wheezing near her in the rear. Some one asked her a trivial question or two, and, between answers, she seemed floating on a cloud, away, away. Beamer Van Wye sometimes conversed in low tones with the judge, leaving her the cynosure of curious eyes.

Presently there was a whack on the bench and the tired voice said something almost inaudible about being well acquainted with the facts in this case. He then growled out some-

thing additional to the clerk below and there was an instant buzz and whisper through all the room. Beamer Van Wye advanced and gave Dulcie his arm and the Colonel and Mr. May came close to her in the rear. At the corridor door Lucian Beardsley, startlingly pale, and his grave brother, were in wait. In the background crowded Mrs. General, much dishevelled, and Lady Emily, very red-eyed. Dulcie stood stupidly in their midst, wondering much. Suddenly she realized Colonel Buckman's words:

"Well, it's done! You are a free woman now, Dulcie."

"Is that all there is to it?" she asked vaguely, even fearfully.

"Yes — thank God!" said Beamer Van Wye. He was mopping his forehead although it was growing colder outside. "There was no defence made."

"Don't see how there could be," said Fordyce Beardsley nervously, "I don't see how there could be, do you?"

"You stood it very well," cooed Lady Emily, fastening Dulcie's little cape affectionately, "but do let us get out of this horrid place. Fordyce, take your cousin, and Lucian will walk with us."

"But I must first kiss Dulcie," broke in Mrs. General, "for she did keep up so bravely."

She bustled up and gave Dulcie a salute on the cheek, then a little whisper in her ear:

"Now you say something nice to Lucian. He is really neglected."

"Don't ask me to," said Dulcie, her lips quivering, "it would break me right down."

"Later, then, I will tell him. He surely deserves it and you are now absolutely free. It is no longer wrong, foolish child. You are as free as air, free to say, act and go as you please without any scandal or comment."

Something upsoared in Dulcie's breast, something blinded her eyes. A mountain fell away, a vista of freedom opened.

"Take care," said Lucian's voice, surely a little husky, "there is a step. Why, Dulcie!" for she was weeping.

To think with Lucian Beardsley was to act. He threw open a door, and seeing a room empty of people, swept Dulcie and Mrs. General right into it.

"There will be people outside," he said briefly, "and she must not cry. I will get a closed carriage in a moment. And tell the others to go on."

It was but a gust, and Dulcie came into the Pullman car for her ride to Grafton quite cheerful.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

METHINKS THE AFFRIGHTED EARTH SHOULD YAWN AT
ALTERATION

DAMME if I like it, Beamer!" The Colonel occupied the best rocking chair in what Linas called the "bridal suit" of the Grafton House. His stockinged feet were elevated upon another chair. Upon an ancient, marble-topped table between him and Van Wye stood a black tray brave with bottles, spoons, a sugar bowl, lemons and glasses. On the stone hearth in front of a generous wood fire gently hissed a small iron tea-kettle.

The lawyer, also coatless, sat with his hair pushed back in great disarray. His feet were far extended towards the heat. His long fingers drummed nervously upon the table.

"Damme if I do like it!" repeated the Colonel, "and I half wish the thing were not done, although I have helped it along since it really

had to be done. I couldn't go up there," he jerked his head to the north, "and feast and laugh and talk rot. I cannot think of Dulcie there now. Lord, Lord! What is life anyhow?"

"Mrs. General observed to me only yesterday," said Beamer Van Wye slowly, "that Paradise would probably be *en fête* to-night, aglow of light on their successful return. There would be a dinner especially composed for the occasion — an actual poem, you know. I ventured to ask her what she considered appropriate for a feast of dis severance, dissolution of partnership, etc. She thought a moment and then cleverly replied, '*Consomme à la bonne femme*, fillet of sole, roast heart, devilled game, Waldorf salad, and Mother Eve's pudding.' That shows that Mrs. General is not without wit and real comprehension of the situation."

The Colonel glared into the fire, wrathful at once.

"What she doesn't know isn't worth knowing."

The lawyer took a small brown pipe from his pocket and filled it carefully. As he lit it, he said, over the tray:

"Has Beardsley ever dropped you any hints as to what he wanted to do about Dulcie?"

"Naw!" the Colonel dropped into his stable

boy's vernacular, "he don't hint. He shuts up or says."

Van Wye blew smoke rings.

"We are all in a queer box. I wish we really knew what Dulcie feels or wants to do. I have not spoken to her alone for two months. I didn't want to, somehow."

"Nor I, not after that Graham business. We ought to speak — we are her oldest friends. She may not want to stay there, actually dependent on him. I do believe, Beamer, he would just as soon marry her to-morrow as marry her at all. He seems utterly cut loose from all the old ideas, much more so than that brother of his. He thinks life is all for pleasure and happiness. He is absolutely indifferent to anything we think or feel whenever it goes against his desires. He does not look upon a woman as we do. I've seen him with the Hartopps and the Greathouse girls. He treats them much as I do my helpers if they're decent at all — like sort of good fellows whom he'd help in any way he could. I think he feels much the same way toward Dulcie."

"You've hit it to a T," puffed Van Wye.

"He feels the lack of something we have at times," meandered the Colonel, "and there is where we bother him. He thinks we fuss over things not worth while and that he will have to humour us while he is here with us. I believe

he will try to take her from Kentucky if he does not marry her at once."

The lawyer took his pipe from his mouth and smiled bitterly.

"I've thought of all this, and yet I have to like the fellow for some things, Colonel. He is absolutely fearless."

"'Tisn't so much courage as indifference," insisted the Colonel; "we're old fogies, with old foggy notions. He won't harry himself with our particular worries and ideas. He expects to lope through life on his money as he has always done. There's only one key to the whole business, and Dulcie holds it. She is free now. Is she going to be a puppet in the hands of those people, or has she got snap enough to see her own fix and to go her own way?"

"She hasn't given me an idea as to how she feels toward Beardsley," said Van Wye, slowly; "it has puzzled me."

"That's the Kentucky in her," returned the Colonel, "and that's my sole hope of her. Dulcie is standing right where she can get out if the lightning strikes her and shows her the way. The thing she does next will decide her whole future."

"I should say so," retorted Beamer Van Wye.

A gust blew against the window panes and there was the sudden hard beat of cold rain.

"Up at Paradise they are lively enough," observed the lawyer. "You saw Beardsley's puzzled look when we backed out."

"I could not go there," growled the Colonel. "I didn't want to go home, either."

The lawyer coughed delicately.

"This has made a heap o' trouble between Sudie and me," went on the Colonel, "but I'll stay by her now and see it through, and trust to time to soothe up Mrs. Buckman. I'm dead tired of it. I'm wondering if it will do any good. I'm sick of it, sick of it."

"If only I knew what the girl was doing," he went on after a silence, his mouth quivering. "I'm a childless man and I can't forget how she has turned to me when she was in her worst troubles. A man ought to have children, especially when he is getting on in years. It keeps him human. I feel her tears on my cheeks yet. I can't tell you how I feel, but I know I cannot stand what I do feel much longer."

"She has stood her world on its head, sure enough," said the lawyer, "as women can. And she has hid away her real feelings if she has any liking for Beardsley. There's been nothing on her part but a frightened hovering under Mrs. General's wing. I never saw her give him a single look or act as if he existed. Dulcie is no light-minded whippet. I cannot imagine her in those doings up

there, coolly eating and drinking and listening to the light remarks and even congratulations of the others. No, sir, I cannot put Dulcie DeWitt there at all."

"Nor I," said the Colonel, "nor I. If only Kitty May had stayed or John May. But no, Kitty May was on the verge of tears when they drove away. It is those moderns who do not care, who think of divorce as they do of the mumps or measles — something unpleasant but to be endured while it lasts."

"Appendicitis is the fashionable disease," murmured Van Wye.

"Appendicitis!" roared the Colonel; "of course. May I die intact!"

"Lady Emily is a good woman," quoth the lawyer, "but Beardsley in his heart thinks her stupid. Dulcie is, after all, in the same hands she has been in — those of Providence. We've got to come back to that as a sort of geological foundation.

"Providence!" scoffed the Colonel, "Providence in the shape of a lot of moderns who do not consider us of the same clay as themselves; who sneer at my few thousands; who call me 'only a hoss-dealer'; who like Dulcie because of Lucian Beardsley's whim; who hunt pleasure as a business; who make their own creed; who are self-seeking only and who put their own delights

above all of the things God made men and women for. Damme! — now do let me swear, Beamer — damme I tell you, I don't like Dulcie to feel that she will have to marry Beardsley, willy-nilly, or think it her duty to fall in love with him out of gratitude.

"I wish we could see her," decided the Colonel; "we will see her, you and I alone, and set things plain before her."

The lawyer held up his hand. The "bridal suit" was private enough to have a sort of vestibule, and from this now proceeded voices. Then a knock came at the inner door.

"It's only me, gentlemen," said the voice of Linas.

Beamer Van Wye trod softly over the floor and looked out.

"I jes' looked in ter see ef you war clothed up yet," Linas said. "Mis' DeWitt that war formally is outen the passway now. She come ovah with John Childress an' is honin' ter see ye all ter-night fer some reason er other."

"Give us five minutes, Linas," said the lawyer, "and we will let her come in."

In conventional array a few moments later, the Colonel hurried into the hall. Dulcie DeWitt, wrapped in a wet cloak and with her head muffled up, was waiting with John Childress.

"I want to see you real badly, Colonel," she began.

"John, you go below and tell Linas you are to get dry and to have what you want," ordered the Colonel, "and wait until we send for you, d'ye hear?"

He led Dulcie into the big room and both he and the lawyer removed her wet wrappings. No festal array was under them. Dulcie had put on her black riding habit and not even a white collar livened its gloom.

"I wanted to see you," she breathed a little hoarsely. "I wanted to talk to you both so much."

"You must get dry and warm first," said the Colonel soothingly. "We wanted to see you just as bad, Dulcie."

He tried to smile at her in his old way.

"I thought you were here."

"Wasn't you afraid to come out, you've been so well taken care of up there?"

"John would do anything for me," she said gently, "and you know he used to carry me around when I was little and had my father. You remember."

They placed a chair for her opposite them in the warmth and fire-glow. She pushed back a few strands of wet hair and put out her hands to the heat. She looked white and frightened.

"It is so good to be with you," she said slowly. "I had to get away from all of it — anyhow for a while. I could not go to their dinner — I could not. I waited until they were all at it and then hurried out of doors. I had to go away."

"Dulcie!" exclaimed the Colonel, fascinated by her tone, "what is all this?"

"I had to be alone."

The men waited for her farther story and she spoke to them as one impelled by unseen forces. Out in the open voices began calling her when the night came down. The same voices had called her when Death had claimed her children and her father. The barriers seemed down between her and her unseen world. Shadow shapes ran close to her and called her vaguely or clearly. She was quite as wildly haunted by the fear or Dr. DeWitt if she went beyond the garden. She looked wildly about even there for fear she might meet that terror from whom she would ever and always flee — her worst foe, the husband that had been.

Free? Who would free her from that man? Nothing in heaven or earth. No God could be powerful enough to erase the blots upon her life, the scars upon her memory. Free? She ran in the wintry wind and cast up her desperate hands to Heaven until they were torn by the thorny, overhanging rose-boughs. Free, when there burned in her heart that bad man's sneers

and leers and awful words and curses? Dulcie realized now. They had never allowed her to be alone, never let her think; but now this hour had come and she had defied them and turned the key on them all.

She was free to live her own life, but she knew not where, and her soul revolted at an artificial one. O, for Aunt Sudie's breast, on which to hide her awful grief! O, for that bitter misery in the past that had been a duty "stiff and holy!"

Presently, as she ran shivering to and fro, even peering out at the gate and down the dark road, there came the thought to her: "Why had Colonel Buckman and Mr. Van Wye not come with them to Paradise, but, in spite of expostulations, left them at the railway station?" They were her old friends, they were very near and dear to her. She wanted them, she must see them, but she could not dare the road alone.

The night was dark and gusty. Sometimes a few drops anticipated the cold rain. Suddenly there came slipping and shuffling feet along the gravel. Old John was making his round of the gardens. She ran to him and she clutched his arm ere he saw her at all.

"John, John, it's your Mis' Dulcie. Don't you cry out. I do want to see Colonel Buckman so much. He is at the hotel, John. You must go with me for my father's sake."

The old man stared at her in dismay.

"Lawd, you take ma breff! W'y ain't yuh in dar whar dinner's gwine on, Mis' Dulcie?"

"I couldn't, I couldn't. John, do go with me?"

"Marse Beardsley won't stan' for it, Mis' Dulcie. I knows dat."

"Shall I go up there all alone?"

"Lawd, no, no! Well, less us hurry. Soon gone, soon come back. Yer won't stay no time?"

"No, no!"

While they were on the way the rain came, cold and pitiless.

"It seems as if I must go mad," finished Dulcie. "Have I done right or done wrong, and what is to become of me? I haven't any hold on anything, Colonel, not anything at all. I seem in the middle of nothing, and everything slipping under my feet. Colonel, tell me what to do next? I don't know what is right or wrong."

CHAPTER TWENTY

SO TRUE A FOOL IS LOVE

THE commonplace, middle-aged horse-dealer and the lawyer with the noble forehead listened to Dulcie's words with both fascination and terror. The exciting did not often come into their lives. That instinct, the love of the dramatic, which is implanted in every human breast, had to be satisfied with what it could glean out of every-day existence. Here was true tragedy. A woman dear to both, held to them by the intangible bond of unsatisfied fatherhood, had risen above the doing of ordinary things and thrilled them with the intensity of her hour of suffering. In her they still saw the child Dulcie, the daughter of their soldier-idol, Philip Childress. As a child she had shared his popularity; after his death she was not forgotten. To these two men Dulcie DeWitt returned to-night with no trappings of fashion, no new modes of speech

or manner. She was certainly more beautiful than ever before, but still the poor, broken, beseeching Dulcie of Glen Farm. The two men rejoiced while they shuddered, because they realized a strength in the woman that had not been known as hers in other days. They felt that, through wrong and truth and woe and martyrdom, a character was emerging, one that grew triumphant before their very eyes, even as an angel, with wide, white wings, rose from a sepulchre long ago.

In different ways both men realized this change, and a courage came to them to once more lay hold for her and work out a way to better things. The Colonel, soldier-like, flew at once to the breach.

"What are you talking about, Dulcie? After we all have stood by you, too!"

"You mustn't help me any more, Colonel dear."

The man gasped and sputtered an exclamation.

"Because it's made great trouble for you, and with good Aunt Sudie. She thinks she is right, and maybe she is. I don't want to stand between you two. Why, that would be wrong in me!"

"Some one has been tattling again."

"Kitty May mentioned it. She knew I

wouldn't like that at all. So, dear old Colonel, you cannot help me any more. I was bound to tell you."

"I am kicked out, am I?" quoth the Colonel grimly enough, "fairly given the mitten. This is, I suppose, all in the new order of things. How about your father's other friend and comrade, Beamer, here? What have you to say to him?"

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"I was your father's friend also, Dulcie," he said gently, "and I stand ready to help you if you will take it."

Dulcie smiled more sadly.

"You cannot do much, either," she said, "for though you are old enough to be my father and I do trust you, every man who is kind to me hurts himself as badly as he does me. That's how I have studied it out."

Both men grew very red. The Colonel rallied.

"What do you want to do, Dulcie?"

She hesitated a moment, then burst out:

"Why shouldn't I tell you two? I don't really know. Something has a hold on me. I do not come to any clear ideas. I used to be able to decide things. When I try now, something paralyzes me. I do not seem to be myself. I want your advice as to what to do."

She spoke dreamily and turned her face to the fire. The lawyer eyed her sharply, then made a sign of caution to the Colonel.

"You are so worn out in your mind — so very tired," he said gently; "when better days come you will find your decisions can be made at once as they used to be made. When people have gone through much mental stress and suffering all things are confused and unbalanced. Time will be very merciful to you. Time proves all things."

Dulcie did not seem to have heard all he said, although she murmured a responsive "Yes" while gazing into the embers.

The men watched her, amazed at the change in her mood. Very softly, then, the lawyer pushed an envelope over the table to the Colonel. On it was one written word. The Colonel leaned over, read it and ejaculated an ominous "Humph!" At this Dulcie dropped the elbow which had supported her chin and looked at them vaguely.

"I was almost asleep — or dreaming," she said softly.

How gently and gallantly the tall man stepped to her side! How bright and soft his deep eyes! There was real music in his voice.

"Dreaming, I hope," he said, "and of brighter, better days. This is the turning-point of your

life, dear lady, dear child, as you still seem to us. You have cast aside your past life and must take up a new one. May it be a happier one, while it can hardly be one any purer, any truer, any less womanly."

Dulcie's eyes filled.

"I am afraid of it—afraid," she repeated, tremulously.

The lawyer rose and stood before the fire. There was a smile on his face, the saddest and sweetest of smiles. His slightly-stooped frame straightened, his voice took on splendid cadences.

"Dulcie, there was a great Persian once, full of wisdom, who outlined our days in one line,

'The Moving Finger writes'

and our own great master of English speech said:

'Thus must I from the smoke into the smother.'

Now, whether that Moving Finger directs you from smoke to smother or from smother to smoke, be yourself. You have fled away to-night from pleasure because of the dictates of your conscience. You have wept when you might have laughed. You could not make a mock of that which good men hold sacred. We love you for it all, Dulcie, but it makes us very sad. You

should not take things so much to heart, you should disregard our old-fashioned ways, you should be light-hearted and merry and look forward to happiness."

"You talk like Mrs. General!" cried Dulcie, aghast.

"She is wise — wise as a serpent. Dulcie, forgive your two old friends. We have been, we are, so full of concern for you that we could not laugh or feast or make merry. We, too, have wondered what you had better do. But there has been an answer sent to us. I believe all that we can say to you is, 'May the same Power and the same Providence have you in hand that has before sustained you,' That is life's sunshine, and sunshine is needed in a palace as well as in a farm-house."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Van Wye."

"You will. There will be the master key. You will know the why and the wherefore of everything. Why I am a failure, and why the Colonel is not happy, and why it would have been a ten times fouler wrong for you to have gone back to Glen Farm than we ever knew. The Moving Finger has written out your destiny as it writes it out for us all. It is coming to you now."

The Colonel was on his feet. Some one again knocked in no light fashion at the inner door. The lawyer waved the Colonel away.

"I will open it myself," he said in his most languid tones. "I claim the right to let in Dulcie's destiny."

Dulcie flew to the side of the Colonel. She was white and beautiful.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said the lawyer, "you have been expected."

The brothers entered the room, singularly alike in the shadow. They were in evening dress, disordered from a hasty drive through the rain. In appearance they were certainly at war with the ancient and second-hand splendour of the "bridal suit," with the two men and the woman confronting them.

One of them stood forth. It was Lucian Beardsley. Every other heart beat at his attitude, his countenance, his expression. With folded arms, with gleaming eyes, with terrible self-control, so he reverted back to his ancestry — a savage being holding himself well in leash.

For a moment there was an intense silence, then the lawyer spoke:

"John did not lose much time, I see."

Fordyce Beardsley's lip was rather scornful.

"What is this, what does it all mean?"

"Simply that Mrs. DeWitt's former life reasserted itself, and that she wanted to see her father's old friends. You do not credit her with the feeling she seems to have."

"Is she sorry she is free?" broke in Lucian Beardsley. with a hard sound in his voice.

"We have not asked her," retorted the lawyer, "and while I do not wish to anger you, Beardsley, I must say that you really know nothing of our women. It is never 'off with the old and on with the new' with our good mothers, sisters and sweethearts. Dulcie's whole soul cried out for us, who do understand all her past. She is sensitive, suffering, and sorely hurt. To-night she was broken-spirited indeed. Let her alone, or, at least, let her be as free as she actually is."

"Is she going to stay here?" asked Fordyce Beardsley coldly enough.

"That is as she chooses. She was in too much misery to count the cost of coming, remember that," returned the lawyer, "and she shall do as she pleases."

"Certainly, but she should consider the feelings of my brother, my own wife, myself also. We have befriended her."

"O you have, you have!" broke from Dulcie.

The Colonel put Dulcie behind with a strong hand. He was red in the face and his voice shook nervously:

"I can't say just what I want to say very elegantly, like Van Wye here, but you all can understand me. You all must let Dulcie DeWitt choose, and there will not be any better time

than this, either. We're all smarting to the bone. She owes it to we all not to harry us any more. Mr. Lucian Beardley cannot have anything to do with this girl's future unless he means to marry her or she means to marry him in due time. In due time, I say, for there will be no to-morrow's marrying of Phil Childress's daughter after a divorce — if I'm a living man. If Mr. Beardsley don't mean marry and Dulcie here don't mean it, why, these two must surely separate and keep separate for their own sakes and to save talk. I don't believe in pushing aside any kind of deals. Let us all understand each other like plain, honest people. I will provide for the girl some way or other, but, unless she goes of her own will her future is assured to me; you modern folks can't have her any longer. There, Dulcie! There, Mr. Beardsley! Now you all settle it. I've done my duty by old Phil, come what will."

He held the woman close to the heaving breast on which she had hidden her face long ago.

"A common old hoss-dealer I am," he growled, "but I'm a Kentuckian, and a Kentuckian never goes back on an honest woman in sore trouble. Van Wye is with me."

"To the end!" cried the lawyer, his eyes bright, "to the end."

The blood left Lucian Beardsley's face. He seemed to grow taller.

"This is a most singular procedure. This is the second time you have made that demand of me, Colonel Buckman."

"I had reasons both times," retorted the Colonel.

"Is this the way to woo your women?" scorned the Virginian. "Ask her if she thinks this fair—if it suits her fancy?"

"She can choose her life after you have said your say," put in Van Wye, "but the Colonel is right. If Dulcie is to remain in our plain life, she had better not go back to Paradise. We will try to find her a home and to aid her."

"It does seem like coercion," broke in For-dyce Beardsley, much excited; "it is not right or fair to either of them."

"O yes, it is, it is!" replied the Colonel, "it's been a case of pollyfoxing around here and there and no end of talk and wonder. Let's settle it once for all and breath easy. Well, Mr. Beardsley, do you answer me like an honest gentleman? What do you intend for Dulcie DeWitt in the future?"

Then the unexpected happened. Dulcie abandoned the Colonel and ran to Lucian Beardsley, whose arm she grasped while the tears ran down her face.

"Don't you tell him, Lucian. You do not

have to, after all your kindness to me. You do not have to marry me at all, and I do not want to marry any one or grieve you. I will go to England with Lady Emily as she asked me to do. Now don't you answer the Colonel, and don't be angry with him, either. I would die for any one of my kind friends, but you must not quarrel over me."

But Lucian Beardsley's face was transfigured. He drew her to him and wrapped her in his Inverness.

"Are you answered, gentlemen? She goes to my brother, who guards her for me. I may not be a Kentuckian, Colonel, I may not be an old foggy or look at some things as you do, but I am human. Here, Fordyce, take her — for me. Where's your cloak, Dulcie? The women at the house are frantic."

In a room empty enough, with the lamp smoking and the embers on the hearth all burned out, Beamer Van Wye spoke his conclusions to the Colonel:

"We've seen an ancient landmark removed, Colonel; there didn't seem any other way, and we helped move it. But it certainly is a sobering business; I hope down here we'll never get to the point of doing it with pipes and dancing and the sound of cymbals. I wish them joy from the bottom of my heart; but I'll tell you somebody I

wish joy more envious-like, and that's you and Mrs. B. You're out of Dulcie's troubles now, and you've got nothing to do but go home and make it up." He stood wringing the Colonel's hand. "You don't care for anybody else in this world. You are the people that I know 'll live happy ever after."

In dramas of Shakspeare have been found lines which well head up some chapters in the life of a Kentucky woman.

THE END

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